

Confident Assurance

This week's Newsweek cover story is called "God & War: How Chaplains And Soldiers Struggle To Keep Faith Under Fire." It's definitely a sobering look at the military chaplaincy and how in times of war even a chaplain's faith can be tested.

The article is built around the story of Chaplain Roger Benimoff and the daily journal he kept in Iraq and now continues to keep as he serves the men and women at Walter Reed.

Benimoff never lost his faith but it's obvious that his faith was stretched to the limit by the things he experiences.

At the beginning of his first tour he's filled with faith and devotion to God and the troops. By the time of his second tour he writes these sobering words, "Can I keep doing this? Is the pain and the heartache worth it? God please let me look to you and no other."

Then he writes, "The spiritual battle I am engaged in is a minute-by-minute war."

The experiences our military personnel go through in a time of war take all the spiritual questions out of the theoretical. Benimoff realized was isn't just about political ideologies, there's an underlying spiritual battle in our world.

For the past several weeks we've been studying that battle and the enemy who stands behind it.

The fact is, Satan is real. He's active and dangerous in all of our lives. It's just that sometimes it takes real crisis to open our eyes to the depth of his destructive nature.

The Bible calls him the Evil One who's agenda is death and destruction.

We resist the devil and stand our ground and he flees, but before we know it, when we think we are free from his enticement, he's back again with a little different sales pitch, a little different angle to tempt and to entice us to sin and to provoke us to question our faith.

This is why Ephesians 6 is so important for us to get hold of. In Ephesians chapter 6,

God lists various components of armor. It's the armor of God that enables us to stand against the deceit of Satan.

Turn to Ephesians 6 pg 1041

We're in a series on Ephesians but we've slowed down here to really take our time and study each detail of the protection that God has provided for us.

We've seen that the command in this passage is to put on the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand. It is important that we know what each piece is and how we put on the armor for ourselves.

So far we've seen the belt of truth, which is a confidence in Jesus Christ through the truth of the Bible. We've looked at the breastplate of righteousness which is God's righteous character dwelling in us through our relationship with Him.

That brings us down to verse 15 and the 3rd part of our armor which is, of all things, the shoes.

Verse 15 reads... **Read vs 15**

To withstand Satan, his attacks, his temptations, his trickery you have to wear the right shoes.

I. Every Part Of Who We Are Is Included In The Battle

It's not like we have "spiritual" parts to our life where Satan attacks, and then "neutral" parts that he doesn't bother with.

The entire scope of our life is under attack, so we never neglect anything when it comes to protecting ourselves from Satan.

From the helmet on our head to the shoes on our feet we have to be protected at every point.

Remember, this was written in the first century and so the armor is patterned after the armor of a Roman soldier of that time.

Now at first, we might be tempted to feel like feet aren't really all that important. Just like we're tempted to disregard some of the areas of our life when it comes to Satan's attacks.

But here we are told that we have to protect our feet.

Think about it. However strong you might be, however well protected the rest of your body might be, if you're wounded in your feet, or if you slip and fall in battle you're in trouble.

Just to show how important feet are, just read through these verses and see the emphasis. 4 times in verse 11 through 14 we are told to stand.

You don't stand on your head, or your arms, or your chest! You stand on your feet. So in a sense everything depends on the feet.

There was something unique about the foot gear of a Roman soldier that helped account for Rome's victories in battle.

Roman foot soldiers wore a special type of sandal. It wasn't a boot or a shoe but a sandal made up of a thick leather sole with straps that held it firmly to the foot.

The Romans called these sandals caligae. You've probably heard of Caligula the Roman emperor. His name was actually Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. When he was 3 years old his father took him along on military campaigns dressed in a miniature soldier's uniform so the soldier's nicknamed him Caligula or "little shoes."

The distinguishing thing about these Roman sandals was that they were studded with hobnails.

To show how important a soldier's shoes can be, one historian has written "One of the reasons for the success of Julius Caesar's army was because they wore military shoes which made it possible for them to walk long distances in such a short period of time, that again and again the enemy was caught off guard thinking there was still time to prepare for an adequate defense."

In a day when armies just met for battle without a lot of military strategy, Rome moved rapidly to repeatedly surprise its enemies.

Not only that but these special sandals helped in other areas too. One of the common devices in the warfare of that day was to take sticks, chisel them to a sharp point and then bury them in the ground with the point just slightly above the surface.

The Roman sandals provided protection from these traps while other armies often lost soldiers to them. If you get a stick stuck in the bottom of your foot you're out of the battle and if gets infected you could eventually die.

A 3rd thing that the special sandals did was to give a firm footing in battle. Much of the warfare of the day involved hand to hand combat. The last thing you wanted was to be in the heat of battle with your feet sliding all around and so these studded, hobnail shoes gave the Romans' a firm footing on all different terrain.

The type of shoes a soldier wore could actually mean the difference between life and death in some combat situations.

Isn't it interesting that God says if we're going to stand effectively against Satan we need to have the proper shoes on. Our feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

So what's this about? What's the analogy? So we can interpret this correctly we need to ask a couple of questions.

First of all, what does the word "preparation" mean? We're to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

John Wycliffe, who lived in the 14th century and did one of the first English translations of the scriptures translates this "in makynge redi" using the English of his day. That was a great translation because that's exactly what the word translated "preparation" means.

The NLT - "For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared."

The NIV - "...and your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

The 2nd question we need to ask then is this: If "preparation" means "readiness" does this verse mean that we are to be ready to speak about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, or does it mean the gospel makes us ready for something?

See, the NLT and the NIV take this to mean that the gospel equips us.

The New International Reader's Version takes it the other way. It reads, "As your shoes the readiness to preach the gospel."

Now which is it?

Many people would reference this with Romans chapter 10. So why don't we look there.

Romans 10:15 Page 1007

Here the Bible is clearly talking about preaching the gospel message. Sharing the good news that salvation is by faith. That's something that every believer has both the privilege and responsibility to do.

It's also something that Satan doesn't want us to do. God wants us to have beautiful feet, Satan wants us to have cold feet - so we won't share, or dirty feet, so no one will listen if we do.

And because both these verses talk about "feet" and "the gospel of peace" many people are quick to assume that they are dealing with the same thing.

I've heard whole sermons based around Ephesians 6:15 telling Christians they need to be preaching the gospel.

Well, they certainly do, but that's not what God is stressing in Ephesians 6. It's always this way with the Bible. If you don't interpret a verse correctly you can't apply it correctly. We want to understand what the verse is saying so we'll be able to apply it to our lives.

Romans 10:15 is talking about introducing people to Jesus Christ. There's no doubt about that. That's what the context is clearly about.

But Ephesians 6 is talking about standing against Satan's attacks. That's what its context is clearly about.

And in this case, the point is not that we are to be ready to speak the gospel, but its that the gospel makes us ready to stand and not fall when Satan attacks.

The gospel of peace equips our feet and it does it in just the same way that those sandals equipped a Roman warrior.

The 3rd question that comes up is "What is the gospel of peace?" If the gospel of peace is going to equip us and make us ready for Satan's attacks what is this gospel of peace?

First of all the word “gospel” simply means “good news.”

The good news of the Bible is that Jesus Christ died as the sinless substitute for all of us sinners.

Jesus Christ died and rose again to reconcile us to God; to make it possible for us to be joined to a holy God and have a relationship with Him.

He died and rose again to provide for our justification. When we believe that Jesus died for us personally and we put our trust in him as Savior not only are we forgiven but we are actually declared “not guilty” by the God of heaven.

Our sins were placed upon Christ at the cross, and His perfection surrounds us by faith. We are found in Him having His righteousness.

Now Jesus is perfect. He never sinned. So if we have His righteousness applied to us, then as the father looks at us He sees the sinlessness of Christ.

We are justified, not guilty. It’s “just as if I’d never sinned.”

That’s the only way a perfectly holy God could accept us far from perfect people.

Now, while you are still there in **Romans**, go back to **chapter 5 Page 1002 Read Verses 1 & 2**

A Christian is a person who is justified by faith. Ask most people what a Christian is and they will tell you, “a Christian is some one who...” and then they’ll give you a list of actions. Goes to church, keeps the ten commandments, follows the golden rule....etc. Well, there are certainly things that a Christian should do, but these things don’t make him a Christian. When I was growing up in my parents household there were some things I was supposed to do and some things I wasn’t supposed to do. Occasionally I got them turned around, but that didn’t have anything to do with being a child of my parents. Whether they were always happy about it or not I was a Regensburg because I was born into the family.

When we believe that Jesus died for our sins and we trust him for our forgiveness, we’re born again. We are born into the family of God. We are justified by faith. And when we’re justified by faith we have peace with God.

All the religious actions and the good works in the world don’t give peace with God

because God being holy is righteously angry with our sin. And good works don't take care of sin, only Jesus' death can do that.

If a person has not trusted in Christ alone for their forgiveness they are under the wrath of God. In John 3:18 the Bible says, *He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

A true Christian in the biblical sense of the word, a believer, has peace with God through faith.

And so the gospel of peace is the good news that Christ has made the way for us to have peace with our Creator. Peace with God comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

Back to Ephesians 6

- I. *Every Part Of Who We Are Is Included In The Battle*
- II. *God Is Challenging Us To Stand Against Satan With The Readiness That Comes Through The Good News Of Peace With God*

This is a letter written to people who have trusted Christ as Savior. This letter to the Ephesians is addressed to the Christians at Ephesus. So God's not talking about believing in Christ in Chapter 6.

In other words, He's not calling people to believe in Christ, He's telling people who have already believed, that the gospel of peace is going to be to them like those hobnail sandals were to a Roman soldier.

Being equipped with the good news of peace enables us to stand firm, without slipping, without losing our footing when satanic attacks come.

The Christian life is the fight of faith. We're never promised a life of ease and rest. We experience warfare. Hand to hand combat. We face the adversary! The accuser! He's constantly there attacking us and bringing his accusations against us.

Think how Satan attacks us. He attacks us when we pray. We turn to God in prayer because of some need, or because some one has asked us to remember them, or possibly just to talk with God.

And the moment we get on our knees the devil begins to act. What he does is he begins to tell us how unworthy we really are. He reminds us of our sinfulness, of things that we have done in the past, of wrong attitudes and actions.

And then turning himself into an angel of light he tells us about the greatness and the majesty and the holiness of God.

And then he whispers in our ear, "How can a person like you expect to be heard by God? Just think of what you're really like down deep inside. No one else knows, but God knows. He's got purer eyes than to look upon sin and you think he's going to listen to you?"

Now let me tell you, you can't argue with Satan about that one. He knows us and he knows God. There's only one way to withstand that kind of attack and that's to have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. There's only one thing that's going to enable you to stand your ground and not slip, that's to have a clear, firm understanding of the good news that you have peace with God.

You can claim Romans 5:1 and tell Satan "I don't go to God in prayer because I think I'm worthy. I don't pray because of my own good life or good works. You are right, Satan. I don't deserve to be heard by God."

"My integrity isn't the basis of my approach to God. My access to Him is based upon Jesus Christ and His righteousness."

"I have peace with God because I'm justified by faith. My sins are cast as far as the east is from the west and buried in the deepest sea."

"God accepts and welcomes my prayers because I'm His child. I was born into His family and I have peace with Him."

Satan says, "Ah wait a minute, God is a holy God who judges in righteousness. He has perfect standards. He has a law that you've broken."

Satan wants to stir up guilt and shame till we don't pray at all.

Now see what happens. When we get into hand to hand combat with the devil. And believe me that happens every time we pray. The only way we'll be able to dig in and stand our ground is through the gospel of peace.

But then Satan not only attacks when we pray but he also attacks when we sin.

Christians do sin. There is no such thing as living above all sin. We are saved by faith but we're still fallible. We still have our old nature.

The Bible says, *If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* I John 1:8. There is coming a day when we'll be like Christ. The day we see Him we shall be like Him, rid of our old nature and never to sin again.

But until that day we will sin. Now, that's not an excuse. God never approves of sin and sin is never justified. God hates all sin. He must punish sin. That's why when Jesus died He died for the sins of the world.

But now what happens to us when we sin as believers?

Satan provides an enticement to do wrong. We willingly go after it and are overtaken in a fault. And the very next thing we find Satan with his sly smile whispering his lies.

He says. "So you call yourself a Christian, huh? If you were really saved you wouldn't have done something like that. If you were really a believer you wouldn't have been involved in sin."

And then he'd misapply a few scriptures and so many Christians say "your right, how could I be an Christian? How could God love me?"

And instead of going to the place where they need to go for their strength, they give up, get discouraged or maybe try to walk down a church isle somewhere to really make it work this time.

Salvation isn't some commitment we make to God. It isn't promising Jesus Christ anything. It's receiving forgiveness. It's believing that Jesus died for us.

And when we believe that Christ's death was sufficient to atone for all of our sins we are justified. That's the good news of the gospel.

If the gospel was have faith in God and then hang on and never sin again it wouldn't be good news. It would be bad news because no one would be saved.

The good news is, *and by him all that believe are justified from all things.* Acts 13:39

If we sin, the place to go is 1st John 1:9 *If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

When we sin we still have peace *with* God because we're accepted in Christ. God has accepted us on the basis of Christ's righteousness not ours. But what we don't have is the peace *of* God.

We have peace with God. We are his children but we don't have the peace of God in our lives. We've violated one of the standards of our loving Heavenly Father. His Holy Spirit within us convicts us of that sin. God wants us to be righteous individuals living in His power.

And so He says, "Confess your sin to me. Agree with me about it. Recognize that thing as sin and wrong and I will restore you. And I'll do it, not because deserve it, but because I'm faithful and I'm just.

Don't argue with Satan when he says, "You just sinned." You're not acting like a Christian. You don't deserve the love of God." Don't argue with him because everything he just said is true.

Instead go to 1st John 1:9. Confess your sin and tell the devil "get behind me Satan, I have peace with God He'll never cast me out. He's forgiven me judicially because of the cross, and he's forgiven me in the area of fellowship because of the cross too. And I'm going to get moving in the power of the cross and the love of God to begin to have victory over sin."

You know, one of Satan's most powerful, debilitating lies is that a Christian can somehow loose his salvation. To some he comes and says, "If you sinned, you must not really be a Christian in the first place." But to others he says "You might be God's child but if you sin, you've lost your salvation and your no longer in the family of God,"

For a while as a new believer, I wrestled with that question myself. As I looked in the New Testament I found some verses that seemed to imply that I could loose my salvation and others that seemed to say it can never be lost.

The way I resolved the problem wasn't to try and pit all the verse one against another, but to come to a clear understanding of the gospel of peace.

I asked, "What is it that saves a person in the first place? What is justification all about? Is there anything that I could possibly add to the finished work of Christ?"

And you know when I finally understood the gospel in a very clear way I never had any more problems with eternal security.

There is nothing that we could possibly do to deserve God's forgiveness.

How could we do something to make ourselves undeserving when we never were deserving in the first place?

The only way a person could ever believe that they could lose God's approval is if they believed that they have gained it in the first place.

If you could earn it you could lose it. But according to Romans 5:2 we have access by faith, into this grace in which we stand. It's being justified by faith that we have peace with God.

We don't deserve God's forgiveness before we're saved, we don't deserve God's forgiveness when we are saved and we don't deserve God's forgiveness on into eternity. It's not by works lest any man should boast.

The only way we're going to stand against the lies and accusations of Satan is through the gospel. And how important it is to make that gospel clear and understandable.

Don't ever tell people that they need to turn from their sins to be saved. Don't tell people that to be saved they need to make Jesus Lord of their life.

Don't tell them salvation is making a commitment to Him or putting Jesus on the throne of your life or any of these other things that people come up with.

God the Holy Spirit says this: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.* Acts 16:31

All that other unbiblical, unclear terminology plays right into the hands of Satan. You end up with one of two problems.

1. Either the person your sharing with has a religious experience but they are not saved because they are trusting in themselves and what they did, with Jesus just kind of tacked on to make things look good.

or

2. They might understand enough to get saved in spite of what you said but they always have these nagging doubts in the back of their mind and so Satan's able to keep them

under with questions and confusion because there's this idea that they had something to do with it.

If you have to turn from your sin to be accepted by God and then the next day you see an area of sin in your life you begin to wonder, "Can God still accept me?"

If you have to make Jesus lord of all but you begin to see some areas in your life that aren't under his control, you'll wonder "Can I still be saved?"

And instead of having a firm footing your out there, your on roller skates and every chance he gets Satan gives you a push and down you go.

The right shoes for a soldier are like the right foundation to a building. If the foundation is weak the building will never stand.

Are your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace?

Do you know Jesus Christ? Are you saved by faith and faith alone? Do you have peace with God?

And if you do, are you standing in the good news of that peace, allowing the truth to be your defense against Satan?

The spiritual battle we're engaged in is a minute-by-minute war.