

Sunday School Notes (11 November 2018): Soldiers of Christ (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Today is Armistice Day, a day on which the world prays that there will be peace, not war. Our lesson, however, is about fighting because Satan never stops fighting! Satan is always trying to get us to leave off from following Jesus. It is as if we are in the middle of a war in which Satan is pelting us with arrows to hurt us and to make us decide that following Jesus is not very comfortable.

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he saw Roman soldiers every day! Therefore it isn't surprising that he uses military metaphors or word pictures in his letters. For instance he tells Timothy (who seems to have been a gentle person, sometimes rather scared of the big job of being a leader in the church) to "share in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ". He then goes on to point out that Timothy must focus on pleasing the officer who appointed him – Jesus Christ.

But it wasn't just Timothy who was told to be a soldier for Jesus, Paul tells all of us to "put on the armour of God" so that we can stand up for Jesus. As Paul dictated his letter to the Ephesians, he was probably looking at a Roman soldier; maybe he was even chained to one! So he lists each part of the uniform and suggests that we need to put it on to fight evil.

1. Roman soldiers wore a leather belt to hold up their robes so they did not get in the way as they fought. When a Roman soldier put this on, it was a sign that he was ready for active duty. We are to fasten on the **Belt of Truth** so that, when Satan tells us lies, we will know that he is talking nonsense. We do this by storing up the truth about God and keeping ready for active duty.
2. The Roman soldiers had a strong leather and metal covering for their chests so their hearts and lungs would be protected. They called this a 'breastplate'. We are to cover our hearts with the **breastplate of righteousness**. This means that no matter what lies Satan tells us, we don't have to panic and wonder if we are good enough to be in God's army. Jesus thought we were worth dying for and has dealt with all our weakness and sin. We are sorted-out with God.
3. What we wear on our feet is important, especially if we are on rough ground. The Romans didn't really have army boots; they had strong sandals to protect them against the pebbles and the thorns/sharpened sticks they used to throw on the battle ground to stop the enemy getting near them. Paul says we must wear **sandals/shoes** so we can keep moving forward peacefully and tell others about God's peace.
4. The Romans carried huge shields both to protect their own bodies and also the other soldiers. At times they held these over their heads so it was as if they were under a giant tortoiseshell and the flaming arrows which the enemy used couldn't get through. Paul calls this the **shield of faith**. This means we can all keep going together, trusting that God is there for us. He will never run away and leave us

stranded on the battlefield. We can trust him to be there; he is always in charge – no matter what arrows Satan sends.

5. On their heads, the Romans wore a leather helmet to protect their brains and their ears and eyes. We have the **helmet of salvation**. We know the facts – Jesus loves us; Jesus died for us; Jesus will come again and take us to be with him. These facts protect us from believing Satan's lies.
6. Once he was dressed the Roman soldier would pick up his sword. This was the main weapon that he used to attack the enemy. Paul says we have a sword too – the **sword of the Bible, the word of God**. When we know our Bible, we can use its truth to fight off Satan. He knows the Bible is true so when we flash its truth in front of him, he disappears (Remember how he left Jesus in the wilderness when Jesus responded to his temptations by quoting Scripture.) This means we can't just listen on Sundays, we also have to remember what we learn.

We are to put this armour on "with prayer". The word is repeated 3 times. Those who love God will then be able to "stand firm" for him when they wear their armour. The church needs 'soldiers of God' who are prepared to 'stand up, stand up for Jesus'.