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The Christian's Armor: The Footwear of the Christian Soldier

The Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University in Medford, Mass. just released the results of a study that addressed the subject of Preachers who are *not* Believers.¹ Not surprisingly the common thread running through all of the individuals involved in the study was a loss of confidence in the reliability of Scripture. The Bible was eventually looked at as being simply a bunch of stories with no basis in historical fact. With that came a rejection of what defines Biblical Christianity. One pastor proudly proclaimed, "I reject the virgin birth. I reject substitutionary atonement. I reject the divinity of Jesus. I reject heaven and hell in the traditional sense, and I am not alone. I am a 'Jesus Follower' for sure. It is arguable whether I am also a 'Christian.' I can't imagine continuing in this work if I did not have a strong personal faith of some kind. My cognitive dissonance revolves around the urge to rescue others who find themselves in the same boat – and who still strongly believe in God in some sense, and find Jesus a compelling religious figure." Another pastor justifies his own unbelief and his vocation this way, "Here's how I'm handling my job on Sunday mornings: I see it as play acting. I kind of see myself as taking on a role of a believer in a worship service, and performing. Because I know what to say. I know how to pray publicly. I can lead singing. I love singing. I don't believe what I'm saying anymore in some of these songs. But I see it as taking on the role and performing. Maybe that's what it takes for me to get myself through this, but that's what I'm doing." He'd like to get out of this situation, but hasn't yet figured out how to do it. "I'm where I am because I need the job still. If I had an alternative, a comfortable paying job, something I was interested in doing, and a move that wouldn't destroy my family, that's where I'd go. Because I do feel kind of hypocritical. It used to be the word 'hypocritical' was like a sin. I don't hold that view anymore: there is goodness, and there is sinfulness; it's one or the other. It's black or white. That there's ultimate absolute truths that are mandated in scripture or given by a supernatural being. I don't see those anymore, so I use the word 'hypocritical' differently, as in, I'm just not being forthright. But, at the same time, I'm in the situation I'm in, and rationally thinking about it is what I've got to do right now." The study concludes by calling these pastors, "brave individuals who are still trying to figure out how to live with the decisions they made many years ago, when they decided, full of devotion and hope, to give their lives to a God they no longer find by their sides. We hope that by telling their stories we will help them and others find more wholehearted ways of doing the good they set out to do. Perhaps the best thing their congregations can do to help them is to respect their unspoken vows of secrecy, and allow them to carry on unchallenged; or perhaps this is a short-sighted response, ultimately just perpetuating the tightly interlocking system that maintains the gulf of systematic hypocrisy between clergy and laity. Perhaps new institutions will arise, siphoning off the congregants into more open allegiances, in which creeds need no special defense or interpretation, since they are already so credible and honorable. Perhaps congregations can transform themselves into such institutions." Brave and courageous? The New Testament refers to people like this as deceitful impostors (II Tim. 3:13), servants of Satan who masquerade as servants of righteousness (II Cor. 11:15), false brethren (Gal. 2:4), who are false teachers (II Peter 2:1). Jude declares that, "These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever (vv. 12, 13)." These "pastors" started down this path by first questioning the truthfulness of Scriptures and then by re-casting God into something that fit their own distorted perception of what constitutes Christianity. Then the

Gospel was over-hauled and the result was apostasy. They did not stand firm on the very thing that they most desperately needed as sinners.

REVIEW: We have been arguing the need for “strength” (v. 10) as a priority for appropriating the armor that is needed to stand in the battle. “The armour of God,” said Spurgeon, “will not serve you unless you yourself are strong. It needs a strong man to carry girdle, and breastplate, and shoes, and shield, and helmet, and sword. Let me impress upon you the fact that we must first of all get strong within, and after that ‘put on the whole armour of God.’” Likewise, the order Paul chose in his description of the armor is of importance. The belt of truth, i.e., our personal understanding and conviction of the truth (what girds us about), is foundational. The “breastplate” of the perfect imputed righteousness of Christ is absolutely essential in the spiritual warfare, for the believer’s internal organs (heart, bowels, etc.) corresponding to the emotions, feelings, conscience, are extremely susceptible to Satanic attack. Therefore the Christian must, with firm conviction, lay hold of the message of the Gospel in its CONTENT with UNDERSTANDING, not with emotional sentimentality or his emotions will be open to attack.

I. THE SOLDIER’S FOOTWEAR

“...and having your feet bound under (HUPODESAMENOI, aorist middle participle, from HUPODEOMAI, to bind under,’ to strap on, compare Mk. 6:9; Acts 12:8; TOUS PODAS, the feet) in the steadfastness (EN HETOIMASIAI, the preposition EN with the dative maybe translated “with” in the instrumental sense, or, as I have translated it, “in,” in the locative sense, stressing location).” The noun HETOIMASIA is found only here in the N.T. (the adj. HETOIMOS is found in texts like Titus 3:1 and I Pet. 3:15), and its usage is hard to determine. Most understand it to mean “preparation” (KJV, NASB) or “readiness” (ESV). The word may, however, in this context have a different meaning. Since this is its only occurrence in the N.T., men like M. Barth and the old Baptist theologian John Gill have argued that the LXX usage is probably the one Paul had in mind. “Not only the modern editors of the Greek text, but the author of Eph. 6:15 himself may have thought of the LXX passages: II Esd. [Ezra] 2:68; 3:3; Ps. 9:38 [10:17]; 64:10 [65:9]; 88:15 [89:14]; Wisdom of Solomon 13:12; Nahum 2:4; Zech. 5:11, that is, of the only occurrences of *etoimasiā* in the LXX. Or they may have had in mind one of the over a hundred LXX texts in which cognates of this noun are used, i.e. the verb *etoimazō* and the adjective *etoimos*. (b) Since the strapping of something under one’s feet figures among other acts of arming oneself, boots rather than sandals may be meant. (c) The feet of the messenger who runs over the mountains are obviously free of any footwear. ‘The boot of the tramping warrior in the tumult’ (Isa. 9:15) is one thing, ‘the [bare] feet of a [welcome] herald’ (Isa. 52:7) or of a Greek or Roman athlete another.”² In much the same fashion John Gill wrote over two hundred years ago, “The word HETOIMASIAI signifies a base, or foundation; and so it is used by the Septuagint interpreters on Zech. 5:11.” Other O. T. examples are Ps. 89:14, ‘Righteousness and Judgement are the *foundation* of thy throne,’ and Ps. 24:2 ‘for he founded it upon the seas and *established* it upon the waters.’ The weakness of the trans. ‘preparation’ is that it does not indicate the kind of equipment which is referred to. It translates the word but not the idea. Thus the word should be translated so as to signify solidity, firmness, solid foundation. “Of the Gospel” TOU EUAGGELIOU, subjective genitive of origin; that is, the noun “gospel” (produces or is the source of the firm foundation) of peace (TAS EIRANAS, genitive of content, i.e., the gospel whose message is peace).” With all this in mind, I prefer the translation of M. Barth, which reads, “steadfast because the gospel of peace is strapped under your feet.” I hope to demonstrate in the following exposition the rationale for this translation.

- A. The Nature of the Armor. While maintaining the position that Paul’s language is drawn from the O. T. (esp. Isa. 11 and 59), we do not rule out the imagery and analogy of the Roman soldier whose equipment would have been well known to Paul and his first century readers. Certainly, this picture of the armor would have been in the mind of those to whom the Apostle was writing. It is the nature of the metaphor which has *it’s* roots in the O. T. There is a basic agreement among N.T. commentators that the footwear that Paul is referring to was not the typical sandal worn by the common people of the day, but the “half-boot” of the Roman soldier (called the CALIGA in Latin). These were made of leather for the most part and strapped around the top of the ankle, sometimes reaching as high as the base of the knee. The distinguishing

feature was the construction of the soles. They were studded with hobnails so as to protect the foot from penetration and to give sure footing in battle.

- B. The Nature of the Metaphor. What is the purpose of this metaphor? Why is it described under the imagery of footwear?
1. A great many commentators have understood this text in the light of Rom. 10:15 (and Paul's citation of Isa. 52:7; compare also Nahum 1:15). The translation "preparation" or "readiness" leads them in this connection to interpret Paul to mean a readiness to go preaching the Gospel. Unfortunately most Bibles list in the side column cross-references to Rom. 10:15; Isa. 52:7 (cf. NASB, Scofield, Thompson Chain Ref.), and this gives the impression that this interpretation is correct. However, the imagery and context strongly militates against such an interpretation:
 - a. The armor is defensive and is addressed to all Christians; all believers are not preachers and cannot have Rom. 10:17 applied to them in general.
 - b. The text in Rom. 10:17 refers to "feet" not footwear. This is important. The herald or messenger was a swift-footed (usually barefooted or in light sandals) runner. He was not equipped like an armed warrior.
 - c. Paul is exhorting (repeatedly) the believers to be armed so that they can *stand*, not run as messengers. The thought, therefore, is not of running the errands of the Master, but of holding the fort for him.
 2. Some commentators, although rejecting the concept of "preaching the Gospel," have retained the thought of "preparation," "readiness," and understand the text to teach that the footwear refers to zeal in the service of the Gospel – a readiness or preparedness to serve. Thus the principle thought is one of movement. Without denying completely the idea of motion, since footwear equips us to walk, run, etc, this interpretation misses the force of Paul's words *in context* – movement and the thought of "readiness to serve" does not fit the defensive nature of the armor. The translation of HETOIMASIAI as "readiness," "preparation," only serves to mislead the interpreter.
 3. Having translated HETOIMASIAI as "*firm foundation*," or "*steadfastness*," the interpretation that the "Gospel of peace" is the firm foundation described under the imagery of footwear best fits the context. The "Gospel of peace" has reference to what Paul already declared in Eph. 2:13-18; it is "peace" made by Christ. "For he himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). It is His peace, and He has not only made this peace, but gives it to His own (Jn. 16:27, 33; compare with Ps. 85:8). Thus His disciples went about preaching "peace by Jesus" (Acts 10:36). It is peace made and proclaimed by Him. The nature of this peace is clearly stated by Paul in Rom. 5:1-10 (cf. also Rom. 8:6; 11:28; 14:17; II Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 1:21), peace *established* upon the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ in His atoning death. He has accomplished it. His death was the means of dealing with the enmity and hostility that stands between God and man. Therefore it is a peace *with God*.

NOTE: We may distinguish between "peace *with God*" and "peace *of God*" along the following lines. "Christ may have died for us; the Spirit may have applied that death savingly to us; and yet we may hold back from the full consciousness of our safety; wrong thoughts and feelings may stand in our way. We are at peace with God; our conscience knows it. But we may so seldom look to Him who is our Peace, and so much to ourselves, that we fail to take the true comfort and joy of our changed position."³ We have, through the finished work of Christ, peace *with God*. This may be called *objective* peace. This is always true, and we can neither add to it or take away from it. But founded upon this is what we may call *SUBJECTIVE* peace. This is the experiential aspect. This may be cultivated. It is to this that the Apostle refers in Phil. 4:6-9. This is likewise an objective peace, but in this sense: it is objective peace personified (comp. Col. 3:15). It is the subjective appropriation through faith of the objective peace which God establishes in Christ. One very important thing should be noticed in Phil. 4:6-9 and Col. 3:15,16; in both cases the subjective disposition is cultivated when faith feeds upon the objective Word of God. It begins when the mind is transformed and renewed (Rom. 12:2) by God's Word. Thomas Manton in commenting on Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have they that love thy law" made this helpful observation, "There is internal peace, arising either from justification, Rom. v. 1; or sanctification: Isa. 32:17, 'The fruit of righteousness is peace;' or from contentment with our condition, Phil. 4:7. By justification we have peace, when God is reconciled and made a friend; by sanctification we have peace, when we walk evenly with

God; and by contentment we have peace, when our affections are calmed and rightly ordered, or set upon more worthy and noble objects, so that we are not troubled at the loss of outward things. These are the ingredients necessary to eternal peace, which is, I suppose, principally intended here—inward comfort and contentment of mind.”⁴

- C. The Importance of the Armor. The soldier’s footwear primarily served the purpose of providing stability. They protected the feet, but more importantly, they equipped the soldier so that he could STAND. They provided firmness so that he could establish himself in combat. Therefore the thought that is uppermost in the mind of the Apostle is echoed many times over in the O.T. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved” (Ps. 121:3). “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved” (Ps. 62:6). With the “Gospel of peace” as our foundation we have a sure footing. Upon this we can stand without fear of falling.

CONCLUSION: “The times they are a changing” sang folk icon Bob Dylan in the middle of the turmoil of the 60’s. Actually, *time* does not change. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years – all remain the same regardless of the century. *Times*, however, has to do with people and *the times* they live in—in other words, cultures are constantly in a state of flux – especially what we often refer to today as popular culture. Carl Trueman astutely observed, “Discussion of culture has become a virtual shibboleth in contemporary evangelicalism, left and right. Whether this is itself a biblical imperative or merely a cultural reaction to a time when fundamentalism ruled the roost is a matter for debate. Indeed, one of the perplexing things about the trendy Christian culture vultures is that, generally speaking, when they talk about ‘culture’ they are usually referring to what we might call popular culture, particularly movies, internet, and music, with, more often than not, a youth orientation. ‘Culture’ as the traditions, institutions, and mechanisms by which a society transmits a way of life across the generations is often not what is in view. No, ‘culture’ today means pop culture, and, ironically, that reduces the concept to a function of the marketplace. Music, movies, and the like are not so much reflections of the broader culture under terms of the second definition above; rather, they represent what is and is not marketable in terms of contemporary taste, and, indeed, they do not simply reflect taste but influence it as well.”⁵ Presently, there are a lot of misguided emergent-minded Evangelicals who are campaigning to make Christianity *culturally* relevant by adopting it to the times with its hostility to any concept of authority, especially Biblical authority, and at a personal level is self-absorbed with a narcissistic and therapeutic understanding of the human condition. The Apostle Paul not only declares that we must do battle against the devil and his forces, but that the battle ground itself is “this dark world” (vs. 12). How essential it is, therefore, that in order to stand and to stand firm in this arena the believer must have a firm footing. It is the Gospel itself that is strapped underneath the Christian warrior as he does battle in such an adverse environment. Paul echoes this thought in another way in Col. 1:23, where he says, “... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” How is this to be done? In Chapter 2 of that same epistle Paul declares in vs. 6, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” It is the Gospel of peace made by the Prince of Peace that accomplishes this, and it is as this truth is grasped that the saint can stand in the day of evil, knowing that underneath “are the everlasting arms.”

ENDNOTES

¹ This is available at <http://www.ase.tufts.edu/cogstnd/>

² M. Barth, *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians II* (Doubleday, 1960), p. 770.

³ B. B. Warfield, *Faith & Life* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1990), p. 339.

⁴ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton IV* (prt. Maranatha, 1976), p. 200.

⁵ C. Trueman, “How Consumer Culture Fuels Change,” *Table Talk* (April 2010) p. 14.