

Ephesians 12 Article

Paul begins with **stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist** (verse 14). The standard form of dress in the ancient world for the Jews as well as for the Romans, was a robe. Imagine a soldier trying to move quickly and deftly in battle, while his legs are getting caught in this flowing robe. When it was time to go into battle, the soldiers pulled their robes above their knees, and gathered the folds of the robe tightly around their waists with a heavy belt. Paul is saying that the first thing believers need to do is to get ready to move into battle. That which makes it possible to move, is truth.

Now what truth does Paul have in mind here? Commentators vary in this. Some say it is the truth of theology or a true understanding of the things of God in the gospel that gives the ability to be agile in the field of attack, to be able to move quickly when Satan is throwing his darts. Others say it could refer to truth in the sense of *living the truth*. In other words, personal integrity. The person who is involved in spiritual warfare, but is weighted down with his own sinfulness, is like someone trying to run through a battlefield with a robe around his ankles.

Whether it refers to theological truth, spiritual truth or the truth of personal character, the point Paul stresses is that the truth is the first piece of armor with which we need to gird ourselves.

With the breastplate of righteousness in place (verse 14). The breastplate in a Roman soldier's armor was the heavy section that fitted over his torso. Its chief purpose was to protect the vital organs of the body from being pierced by an arrow or a sword or other weapons. Paul says that Christians need to protect their vital areas with righteousness. Remember the classic story of the great hero, Achilles, who seemed to be invincible. The legend is that his mother, when he was a baby, dipped him into some kind of magical potion that coated his entire body with an invincible shield. But when she dipped him into this substance, she held him by the tip of his heel, so that one portion of his body was not covered with the magic solution. It was there that, in the course of a great battle in the Trojan War, Achilles was struck in the heel by an arrow and was slain. He had one uncovered point on his body where he was vulnerable. When believers are living in unconfessed sin, they are vulnerable to the assaults of Satan.

In the ancient world it was customary, in some places, that if the messenger brought bad news, he was punished with death. If it was bad news, then, he would be burdened by the news that he was carrying, and fearful of what treatment he might expect. As each city posted lookouts to watch the approaching runners, it became almost a science whereby the lookout could determine whether the messenger was bringing good news or bad news, just by his feet. If the messenger was bringing good news of victory, his feet would be flying and he would be kicking up a lot of dust. There would be an exuberance and an enthusiasm in his gait, as he approached the walls of the city. Hence the phrase, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

Paul is saying that there is nothing more beautiful to see than a messenger who is bringing good news, and that is what the word 'gospel' means. It is the good news of the peace that we have with God, having been reconciled to the Father by the work of Jesus. The gospel becomes that which protects our feet, covers our feet and makes us mobile in the battle against cosmic evil.

To *pray in the Spirit* does not mean praying in tongues. Praying in the Spirit means that the Spirit helps us to communicate with the Father, interceding for us. When Paul tells us to pray in the Spirit it reminds us of what Jesus said to the woman at the well, that we are called to worship God in Spirit and in truth. Not in a perfunctory manner, not by reciting our favorite syllables or empty repetitions, but praying from the depths of our souls. To pray in concert with the Holy Spirit means that the communication is earnest in its origin and in its passion. Unconfessed sin will hinder our effectiveness. ¹

¹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians (147–153)*. Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.