

The Vulnerable Leader

The Bible tells us to "*put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*"(Ephesians 6:13).

What can we infer from this?

First we need to understand something of the nature of the armour. At the time the scripture was written, the armour most familiar to the people would have been that of the Roman legions, so let's take a closer look at some of the practical implications of the imagery this would have brought to mind. I have made no attempt to analyse the spiritual definitions of the armour in this document, but may well do so in a separate document. Here, I've concentrated on the use of the armour and noted some thoughts that it inspired in me.

The different parts of the armour mentioned fall into two categories: items of defence or protection and weapons of offence or attack.

The defensive items were

- The belt or cingulum a Roman soldier wore around his waist was basically a holder for his dagger and the apron that hung from the front portion of the belt.

This leather apron was partly protection for the lower waist and partly ornamental. The soldier could fasten strips of leather to the front of his belt and attach his own choice of decoration to these attachments. Mostly the soldier added tokens and discs to signify the campaigns he had fought in.



- The breastplate made of metal worn over a light woollen tunic and fastened at the back by leather straps. There are various views on whether there was a back plate to match the back plate. Some descriptions imply there was, others not. It may be a matter of rank or wealth which would define how well the back was covered. However, even if there was some rear protection, the straps at the rear were exposed.



- The footwear: based on the everyday sandal, the soldier's sandal also included protection for the shin, although this seems to be more for the senior ranks. The sandal had to be tough to enable the soldier to march over rough terrain without damaging his feet.



- The shield: worn on the left or weaker arm to protect it with a right-handed assailant. The shield was carried by threading the left arm through straps on the back meaning that it became, in effect, an item of clothing.



- The helmet: the head is probably the most vulnerable part of the body - without it, the body cannot function. The Roman helmet therefore protected as much of the head as possible while still allowing the wearer to use his eyes and ears, the primary organs he would use to alert himself of danger. It was held firmly in place with a chinstrap.



In addition to these defences, the common foot soldier carried one weapon, his sword. The Roman sword was short (about the length of the forearm) and designed for stabbing and thrusting at close quarters, unlike the more modern épée or rapier (or even the medieval broadsword) which are geared to keeping the enemy at arm's length.

In looking at these two categories, I noticed that one distinction is that the defences are worn so that they cannot be dropped while the sword is to be seized and used. The Roman soldier was expected to wear his armour at all times (it was not uncommon to march 20 miles a day in full armour) so that he was always ready for battle.

An important thing to notice is that the armour is designed to **face the enemy**. The protection was predominantly to the front so turning your back was not an option. Not only would it leave the lesser protected rear exposed, there was the added danger of the straps of the breastplate and the sandals being cut so that, even if he turned back, the front would also now be vulnerable.

Not only was the Roman soldier expected to face the enemy, he was also expected to fight, and at close quarters. That's why he had his sword. James 4⁷ says, "*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" Nowhere do I find, "*Flee the devil and he will leave you alone.*" While this may appear to work, the reason Satan may seem to leave you alone is likely to be that he doesn't need to turn you from your current path.

As Christians, we are called to don the spiritual armour and enter the battle against the forces of evil. There is no option to

- retreat
- desert
- conscientiously object

We are told that we must stand firm. To understand what that means, let's switch analogies for a moment to that of the modern day police riot gear. Apparently when being trained, the police are told not to stand still but to keep pressing forward. To do otherwise will result in being pushed back or knocked down and risk being trampled underfoot. The Roman army would not be expected to merely hold their ground but to capture the enemy's territory.

This doesn't mean that we are not to beware of Satan prowling like a lion - on the contrary, as we enter the fray, we need to sharpen our defences! That's why the eyes and ears are left uncovered.

Implications for the Christian Leader

The leader in the Roman army had the responsibility of leading his troops into battle and to determine and employ tactics that would achieve his emperor's (i.e. Caesar's) objectives. Similarly the Christian leader is

charged with the responsibility of determining the appropriate strategies for accomplishing God's purposes in his (God's) church. This will include engaging the enemy, Satan, in spiritual battle. Indeed, all areas of Christian service we will encounter satanic opposition - it's only when we hold back from serving God that Satan can take it easy. We can, however, take courage in the fact that the victory has been won and that today's struggles are just the final skirmishes where Satan seeks to prevent as many as possible of his followers moving over to the Lord's side.

As the Christian leader will of necessity be in the front line, it means that the weaker part of his spiritual armour, the rear, will be exposed to his followers. He will by nature of the battle and the armour make himself vulnerable to them.

What about the followers?

When the leader leads, the follower has three choices:

- To come alongside the leader and fight at his side.
- To follow at his rear, providing support, encouragement, and protection.
- To attack the leader's exposed rear. Of course, this raises two questions: Is the follower really following and is the leader really leading?

In Christian terms, we can translate the term follower as "church member" or "congregation". If a church finds itself in the situation where church members are attacking their leader(s) the issues must be resolved or Satan can sit back while the church fights his battles for him.

The Key Issue

It is essential that trust is exercised in the church. The congregation must be able to trust the leader to determine and follow God's direction and the leader must be able to trust the congregation to support him in his ministry.

And Finally

The ultimate leader of the church is, of course, God. All Christians, and especially the church leader, must follow him and be subject to him. We need to discern God's will for us as revealed in his Word and by the Holy Spirit. It's not about power but about service.

