

DEFINITION: Accessory

Armour is the timeless accessory for the soldier of war. Armour changes, becomes more effective, deadlier, but armour always remains the accessory of the soldier.

An accessory is something that *approaches or comes close to someone*, through **beauty** or **effectiveness**.

A soldier's armour therefore is an accessory that allows the soldier of war to be more **effective**.

But there are also accessories that attract through their beauty. Take jewellery for example. You may notice a nice pair of earrings or a necklace and be brought close to someone through the beauty of the jewellery or the jewellery may invite a story about a family member who had the jewellery before the current wearer.

OVERVIEW: Roman

This morning, before we look at the armour of God, I want to talk about the context in which this letter was written. We will then talk about modern experiences that might help us see similarities between our lives and the lives of the people who originally received this letter and therefore the image of the armour of God, will make more sense for us.

CONTEXT: ROMAN ARMY

Estimates suggest that at the time this letter was written there were as many as **60 000 regular and auxiliary** Roman soldiers in the Holy Land. By the year AD 100, there is believed to have been *between* 400-500 thousand total soldiers in standing army of the Roman Empire.

The historian Josephus describes the Roman people as if they were "**born readily armed**".

The standing army was made up of citizens of many ethnicities but there were also urban police forces in the largest cities, particularly in Rome itself. From my limited research, these urban police forces were sometimes in competition for power as they were controlled by different factions within the senate. So largely the ancient Roman citizen including early Christians lived within a very tentative peace: a peace maintained through show of force.

In the Empire of Rome, peace was always through show of force.

All this to say that the citizens of Rome including the early Christians were daily confronted and likely intimidated by Roman soldiers.

MODERN DAY EXAMPLES

How would this presence of force look today? It depends where you live.

If you have ever visited large cities in Central America, you will have a better idea of what it is like to live under peace, maintained by and armoured presence. If you ever venture beyond the relative security of the recreation or tourist areas of Latin American countries you will see a modern comparison to our spiritual ancestors in the Roman Empire. In some Latin American cities there is an unmistakable show of force, used to enforce peace.

I visited Mexico City in 1995 as part of a mission exposure trip. Before that trip I had only ever seen machine guns on TV (A TEAM) or in the movies. Never in real life and never so close at hand. But there, every bank and government building had at least one heavily armed and heavily armoured guard in front of it. Peace through show of force. This came particularly close when, on a bus ride outside Mexico City, some armed force, I am not even sure who they were, stopped the bus. All the men were told to get off. We were all searched at gun point and while all my group got back on the bus, a couple of locals weren't allowed back on.

Peace through show of force.

I ALSO remember on a trip in 2007 to Guatemala City. It was late at night and our compound was about to be locked down for the night.

As the city began to lock down, I saw a Frito-Lay truck speeding down the street (Frito-Lay makes potato chips) ... as the truck flew by a man in full body armour with a shotgun, was hanging onto the back of it. I don't think I ever imagined that one's cheezies would need to be so well guarded.

Closer to home and closer to today, I have noticed, and you probably have too, the increase in visible security in our own city. Grocery stores, banks, clinics, larger outlets all feel the need to have **VISIBLE SECURITY in body armour**.

I say visible security because I am pretty sure that there has always been some degree of plain clothes security in our larger stores. I suspect this because my grandmother's wallet was stolen and then promptly returned to her by the plain clothes security at Simpson-Sears where she often shopped.

But hidden security is quite different from visible security. Visible and armoured security says something quite different doesn't it? But most of us will remember the days before our own cheezies seemed so vulnerable and needed so much security.

I wonder if we are heading into a phase of our culture where peace will be enforced by fear.

ROMAN ARMOUR

Roman armour was intimidating.

Like all armour and really all uniforms, Roman armour was meant to dehumanize Roman soldiers. That wasn't a person behind all that armour: that was power, authority and suppression ... all in the name of peace. The Roman soldier wasn't flesh and blood he was a well formed component of a collective artificial intelligence that, in the name of peace, was programmed to maintain a show of force.

Normal human instincts of fear or doubt were all trained out of the soldiers. Any individual instinct of mercy or gentleness was programmed out of their DNA. The Roman soldier was designed to be as impregnable as indifferent as their metal shields and swords and helmets and breastplates.

They were not persons, o no, the Roman soldier was part of a very present war machine. The early Christians to whom this was written would have known their intimidation and SO would have feared, even the approach of a Roman Soldier. The peace of Rome was established as a sort of dare ... ***do you dare stand in opposition to this war machine?***

And it was in the face of this armed presence that the Apostle Paul gives the Christian a vision of this spiritual armour.

BEFORE YOU PUT ON THE ARMOUR OF GOD

Paul gives a couple of directives to the Christian, before the armour is accessorized.

He says first: Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. This makes sense, doesn't it? Roman armour was a VISIBLE ***extension of the political will*** of the Empire. The Roman soldier was the long arm of Roman politics and policy.

So is the armour of God. The armour of God is an extension of God's GOSPEL power and Kingdom of God principles. They are the accessories of the Christian in order to attract people to the gospel through human beauty and to make the peace of God's Kingdom, more effective.

The armour of God reflects the will of Jesus, whose gospel we are sharing. It isn't for the individual Christian to decide the meaning of the armour, because it belongs to God and is gift of God's strength and God's purpose.

The second thing Paul says is that this is a spiritual armour because our struggle is not against flesh and blood (v.12).

Notice what Paul does here:

He humanizes or attempts to rehumanize the roman soldier. He was saying to the early Christians, a Roman soldier appears to be the machine of war, impregnable, indifferent but under that armour is a person of flesh and blood ... a Creation of God ... a person made in God's image, made for redemption. Even those who appear to be our enemies, are flesh and blood under whatever armour they are wearing.

The other week, Dan Eisenhuth reminded me how important this is to remember that the enemy of the Christian is not flesh and blood. He asked to pray with me for the benefit of someone who had tried to intimidate him. We prayed that what was troubling this person would be healed and that the person would be set free from his struggles.

Paul is reminding the Church that our enemies are not people. Our enemies are spiritual or political powers that work against Kingdom values and it is against these spiritual enemies that the power of God, which is like armour, is given.

THE ROMAN BELT

The Roman belt was usually links of chain which provided both protection and flexibility. Sort of like hockey pants, without the suspenders. Lower body armour was important because the legs of the soldier carry the army. And certain wounds hurt more than others. This armour made the Roman soldier more effective.

BELT OF TRUTH/SEARCH FOR GOLD

Paul writes we as Christians have something like this belt. The truth is if you have no belt your pants will fall down and you won't be effective, but it isn't really a belt. The Christian accessory is called truth.

It is part of God's power for the Christian, but the real Christian accessory.

Truth is what we hold to. Truth is a light in the darkness. Truth is a foundation to build on. Truth is something that we cling to when everything else is moving. Truth is that which holds us upright and functioning, even when the world is shifting around us.

I believe that the truth is like THE SEARCH FOR GOLD. You have to go through a lot of worthless dirt to get to the gold. Have you ever watched someone pan for gold. It is a skill that requires patience but is a process driven by something of great VALUE. I believe the truth is like this.

It takes a lot of work to get to the truth. Yes, the twitter-verse claims that truth can be found in the length of a few sentences, but we know this isn't truth.

Any modern serious issue is more complicated than right and wrong, yes or no. We know this. The truth takes a lot of work mining through untruth to get to the nugget of truth. We often think the gospel is so simple, yet if the gospel was so simple why wouldn't the New Testament might be just one verse: John 3:16.

There are some obvious simple truths to the gospel but the gospel is complex and requires a lot of mining. When you put on truth as a gospel accessory, be prepared to have that truth mined to the very depth of your soul by a world that doubts in truth itself. But as you hold fast to the truth you have discovered, may it turn out to be a beautiful accessory that draws people closer to Christ and God's Kingdom.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS/ HARD HEARTS/HARD WORDS

The Roman breastplate protected the heart and lungs. But the Christian accessory here is righteousness.

Paul writes this in Ephesians 4: 24: ***put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

Our righteousness is the accessory that allows others to see Jesus' own righteousness and holiness at work in us and to witness how it transforms us.

If the breastplate protects the heart and lungs of a soldier, then Christ's righteousness must also protects our hearts and lungs. The Bible often warns about how our hearts may be hardened against God's righteousness and holiness. Against the many things can harden our hearts, Jesus says, don't let your hearts be troubled, believe in me. And through belief, through faith the righteousness of Christ is given to us as an accessory. By God's strength, we withstand becoming hardened and consequently our speech remains gospel.

Our breath is of the Holy Spirit, who speaks for us when we do not have the right words ourselves, but speak Good News. Words of mercy and compassion from a righteousness of the same kind, which is Christ's. Righteousness is the Christian accessory that allows others to witness Christ's resilient compassion at work in us.

ROMAN MILITARY SHOES/SHOES OF PEACE

The Roman soldier was issued metal shin pads and leather sandals. These were to protect the feet, as the Roman enforced peace through the lands.

Contrast this with Isaiah's vision of well equipped feet:

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

While Roman feet carried thunderous dread, Christian feet are fitted for the Good News of the peace of Jesus Christ. I don't believe the opposite of peace is war, I think that the opposite of peace is fear.

There is a time of righteous anger, which may jeopardize a ideal peace, but for the sake of justice sometimes a quiet peace must be put aside for a just peace. Peace is not the absence of conflict but rather the presence of justice, under the banner of a significant peace.

The Christian accessory here is peace. This peace is the beautiful accessory that is meant to bring people close to Christ who is the Prince of Peace.

FINAL ACCESSORIES

The final three Christian accessories are faith, which is like a shield, the Word of God, which is like a sword and salvation which is like a helmet or even a crown(?).

When we think back to the image of the Roman soldier however, these armaments, the shield, sword and helmet, more than a belt, a breastplate or shoes, are far more able to be used to harm another.

If you have seen any of the marvel movies, yes Captain America uses his shield for defence but also uses it as a weapon when he throws it.

A sword can be used to deflect a sword strike, but can obviously be used to strike a blow.

And a metal helmet, can protect the head, but if an opponent is close enough a helmet can be used to amplify a headbutt. And this is the danger of too closely associating the Christen accessories of faith, God's word and salvation with military armour.

Military armour is all about intimidation and provocation of fear. Christian faith, God's word and our salvation are meant for beauty, as accessories that bring others close to Jesus.

But too often I have heard these Christian accessories used more like the armour of a Roman soldier and not beautiful or effective at all as accessories of the Kingdom of God. History has revealed the worst of Christendom to be those times when Christians have equated military armour as a means of enforcing our own peace.

Our armour is God's strength given to us as truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ, who better than anyone exemplified that flesh and blood were not his enemy, but even giving his body and blood for the atonement of all.

FINAL THOUGHTS/PRAYER

All of these accessories of God's strength, which is like armour, is ineffective without prayer. Paul uses the word pray four times in the last few verses.

Pray in the Spirit.

Pray in supplication, meaning pray for others.

Paul says pray for me ... when I speak about the mystery of the gospel.

And says pray that I may be bold as an ambassador IN CHAINS for the gospel.

Notice Paul doesn't say put on the Armour of God and come and bust me out of prison. Paul doesn't say pray for the demise of those who incarcerate me.

He says pray that I may be a bold ambassador for the gospel.

Do you know what ambassadors are? They are missionaries of their home countries. Ambassadors staff mission outposts in foreign lands. Ambassadors fulfill missions to foreign states and lands.

For example, there are 129 Canadian diplomatic missions around the world ... salting the earth with Canadian values.

Christians were never meant to be foot soldiers like the Romans, we are meant to be ambassadors and our accessories for our mission are in the strength of God ... who gives us truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the Word of God and salvation. These are the accessories of the ambassadors of Christ ... who salt the earth with the values of the Kingdom of God.

May our putting on of these accessories bring many close to Jesus Christ through beauty and effectiveness. Amen.