

# Notes on Ephesians 6:10-20 Comparing to Roman Soldier

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In this post I will take a look at the similarities between armor of Roman soldier and how it can be used to understand the verses by Paul.

Purpose of armor is to protect us in battle. This was the most important thing for a soldier of that day. Although the particular context here in Eph 6:10-20 is that of the Roman soldier's armor, we can apply it broadly to other armors as well, as we will in this post. Hence armor changes over time to protect from javelins or arrows to bullets and other forms of biological weapons etc.

The Roman armor had specific parts and had evolved to be sophisticated, hence Paul uses that to demonstrate what we as believers need before we go into battle. There were three major types of armor - Lorica segmentata, Lorica hamata and Lorica squamata. Although these words were given in the 16th century to the old Roman armors, we will use them as its commonly used in modern days to refer to them as well.

The most commonly used one and successful one was Lorica segmentata, which is what I will use to demonstrate. This was known to weigh about 9kg, not too heavy. It was successful in saving many a lives of soldiers. The soldiers all seem to prefer this style as well.

**Citizen** To be a soldier of the army, you have to be a citizen of Rome. For us to be a soldier of God's army we are more than citizens of God's kingdom, we are to be His adopted sons [Eph 1:5]

**Promise of a good life** Soldiers were promised land, benefits from state, potential entry into politics, moving up of classes and what seemed to be a guaranteed security for their future. This was what drove a lot to become a soldier, although pride and honor played a part. As followers of Jesus, we are promised eternal life and treasures in heaven once our earthly life ends. [Mat6:20]

**Armor is Free** Although early armors had to be purchased by the soldiers, as Rome grew, the empire gave the soldier the armor. Our armor as described in Ephesians is given by the grace of God and a free gift to us. [Eph2:8]

**There is a cost** Soldiers were expected to wear this most of the time and it made for an uncomfortable living. They had to get used to not having some of the *freedom* of movements that armor hindered due to sheer size and inflexibility of it. [Mat16:24, Luk14:7] talks about the cost - we are called to carry our cross and follow Jesus. It was not meant to be easy, but it is a simple command.

**Wear it over** Romans wore their armor over their tunic. They were not naked underneath. We have to wear our armor over our earthly self, which although has been saved with the Spirit of God living within us [Rom8:9], still is fallen and we have to contend with.

**Fancy gets you killed** Several Roman soldiers were known to drown during crossing of water bodies, as they tried to add additional layers for protection or have a fancier under garment to show their wealth. Trying to read the Word out of context or extrapolating what is not in the scriptures will distort the Gospel and might get us killed.

**Uncomfortable at first** As we saw earlier, its unnatural to wear the armor at first, but once soldiers get use to it, its easier. Similarly, praying and walking with God in righteousness is uncomfortable, but the Holy Spirit makes it easier as we tread and then full on sprint with the power He gives us.

**Start with belt** Belt is the most important part and is needed before getting started in wearing the full armor. Firtsly, it holds the mid part around the pelvis and stabilizes the rest of the items that need to go on us, some of them anchoring on or via the belt. [Jer13:1] God uses a linen belt to demonstrate how a powerful item that hold our entire garment together will be destroyed when not taken care of. The belt in the spiritual sense is the truth. Truth here is the Word of God as spoken by Him through his prophets and apostles. So if I miss the truth or dilute the truth or mix truth with falsehood, then my entire armor is of no use. The truth is also the correct interpretation of the Word of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit, understood and digested in our limited mind. False theology and false doctrines are like the Euphrates that destroyed the linen belt in Jer 13.

**Breastplate** Once the belt is worn or having supported the mid part (girded your loins), you have the support to wear the breastplate. This was key in protecting the body of the soldier against hurling objects. Once we have the truth and the knowledge of it, we can apply to become righteous through Jesus. This then provides our righteousness that comes from working out our salvation to be approved by God. The actual meaning of the greek word used is God's approval.

**Sandals** Then cover the feet with caligae - or what can be translated to sandals or boots or shoes. It was more akin to the leather sandals that have straps and is closed toed. These were both comfortable and designed to not chaff. It was crucial to have good caligae as the life of the soldier depended on it, as he sometimes travelled well over several miles in one stretch. The command here is to go out and preach the Word, the Gospel of Jesus, which is the gospel of

peace, which is when the attacks start to come from. This is the first indication of an offense from our standpoint, spiritually.

**Shield** Now that we are on the move with our sandal and covered with our breastplate, we will get attacked, so we use a shield to defend ourselves. These shields were leather or wood or both during Roman times and were very good and deflecting various sharp objects. Similarly when we are under attack, we need to use faith in Lord Jesus to extinguish the arrows which are not only sharp but flaming to burn our souls. This faith is an active faith as it has to be moved to counter the arrows coming at us. This inherently calls for us to be vigilant, as if we get attacked from the back, we are aware so we can turn around and put our shield in front to protect ourselves.

**Helmet** Finally, we cover our head which is an easy target during close combats using a strong metal helmet, which protected many a soldiers lives. The helmets in Roman times were used to decorate and show the royal plume or in other garb, which made it more regal. Similarly, our helmet is our salvation, which guarantees our victory even in physical death. Salvation is the most beautiful decoration for a believer that makes our self shine with joy that comes from what our Lord Jesus did for us on the cross.

**Sword** As we are on the move we also can attack and do damage with our sword against the enemy, who is either asleep or not paying attention to us or ready for us to attack. The sword is very important as that is the only offense we have outside of our mobility, which gets us to be on offense. The sword here is the Word of God that we use as we preach to the unsaved world by moving towards them in our sandals. Hence the sandals and sword go together. The wielder of the sword is the Spirit of God who is in us.

**Armor for today** The full armour from Roman time has changed significantly from the metal ones during knight era to the modern day kevlar suits and body armors. The reason for this is that the weapons and what we are attacked with and by has changed. From a piercing arrow or steel javelin to metal bullets to biological virus. More over the covering also increased. In Roman times there was no protection for the legs or arms other than the shield. But in medieval times we had steel leg and hand coverings to full protect all parts of our body, including a face covered helmet. Horses also gave faster mobility in addition to a better sandal or boot.

Similarly, we need to be aware of the attacks against us that is coming from our current culture and the world around us. From subtly false doctrines to outright deception in the name of Christ to use of worldly techniques to reach God, we will be constantly under attack as will the souls we need to save using the sword of the Spirit.

But the recipe stays the same as what Paul has given us, as long as we are true to the Word and following it as we walk with our Lord Jesus. The battle has changed theatres and venues but the enemy has been around much longer than any of us and has had a lot of practice. But with the truth that is God's word

and the recipe in these verses, we are called to battle as the victory is guaranteed in life or in death [Phil1:21], as long as we stay true to the Word and trust in Lord Jesus for our salvation.

A separate post on Spiritual Warfare to come in the next few months.

**In conclusion** Paul, through the Spirit of God in him, writes this beautiful and practical letter which sets up the truth, establishing what it takes to be righteous in Christ (and how we could never be righteous before without Christ) and then the blueprint for building on the righteousness to live out our lives in the key areas of being a husband, father, son, master or slave - employer or employee. It also provides the key message of the Gospel to take and go on offense to win souls for the Kingdom of God. It also gives us key doctrines for us to defend our own faith while expanding our understanding around the nature of our own salvation.