

“Paul’s Product Proposal” (alliteration so not gadget)

Ephesians 6: 10-20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor 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. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

If you flew on a plane any time prior to 2015, you probably took a moment to leaf through the SkyMall catalog. You remember: the magazine that was full of innovative and weird products you didn’t really need: Like a Yeti garden sculpture? Or how about a sleep mask that plugs into your iPod or a pen that takes pictures? Leafing through that catalog on a long flight, you might have started to think you really did need that replica Harry Potter wand or that voice-recognition grocery list organizer. But, alas, SkyMall filed for bankruptcy in 2015. Seems that now, in a world where gadgets are multiplying at a high rate of speed, people aren't waiting until they fly to grandma's to do their shopping for battery-operated gadgets.

The best new gadgets of 2014 featured *wearable* tech for the first time. Smart watches, activity trackers that you wear on your wrist (like Fitbits) and cameras that you can wear on your helmet, were just becoming more common. The Ritot Projection Watch, for example, is a gadget that can display the time *on your hand* in beautiful digital colors because, you know, turning your wrist to look at a regular watch is, like, such a hassle. Hush Smart Earplugs came out that year that would block out sounds you don't want to hear, like your husband's snoring or your neighbor's yappy dog, but still allow you to hear sounds that you did want to hear, like the ringing of your phone. Another wearable technology came out around 2014 called “The ShotTracker” which was a device that uses a wristband to track how well you're doing at shooting a basketball, because simply keeping score clearly isn't enough.

New Gadgets for 2022 also include wearable technology like Vive goggles that can bring you virtual reality that look like the kind of goggles you would wear snowboarding instead of those huge viewers. They now have a ring that tracks health and med stats. It includes an accurate sleep tracker. Garmin has a sport hybrid fitness tracker that looks like a watch and of course there are several new smart watches on the market that can do more and more.

But while a lot of this gadgetry is interesting, most of it isn't essential, nor is it a cure-all for the inherent messiness of life. A smart watch might make it easier to answer your phone or check your calendar quickly, but *it won't protect you from over-scheduling yourself*. Your helmet camera may record cool videos of that epic ski run or downhill mountain bike ride, but it won't keep you from bashing into a tree. In fact, our reliance on tech sometimes gets us into trouble, like the people who hike with a wristwatch GPS instead of a map and are hopelessly lost when the battery runs out.

Now I titled the sermon **Paul's product proposal** because I wanted to practice alliteration which helps people remember things when all the words of the title start with the same first letter. It could easily have been called Paul's gadget proposal but I wanted to stay with having p be the first letter. Staying with the theme the Roman's typical outfit for war was called a **panoply**. Paul uses the Roman panoply as a metaphor for God's "gadgets." God's gadgets can be classified as *wearable tech that never fails, is highly mobile, offers ironclad protection from danger and never runs out of power?*

The apostle Paul offers us a catalog snapshot of just such a product, and the cool thing is that it's free! It's a figurative "suit of armor" that's actually functional, unlike the 6-foot-tall Italian Armor Sculpture available in the SkyMall catalog back in 2013.

As I said earlier, the Greek word for this gadget is "panoply" which was the light, maneuverable, state-of-the-art armored kit of the Roman legionnaires who were seen all over the Mediterranean world. The Roman Panoply was designed to be used within the virtually impenetrable Roman phalanx, which is the word for the combat formation they used. The panoply featured gadgets with both offensive and defensive capabilities that shielded the empire from its outside threats better than any anti-virus software for your smartphone could ever do.

This was wearable tech at its most basic and most effective. Paul saw the Roman panoply as a metaphor for the kind of tech that the church needed to wear in order to survive "the wiles of the devil" and stand against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (vv. 11-12). Unlike the Roman legions, whose panoply was designed to "struggle against enemies of flesh and blood," the church's enemies are those powers that seem always to be poised to invade our lives, often through the very gadgets that we carry, wear and watch. Glance at your cell phone, your tablet or your computer, and chances are you'll see plenty of images and invitations that are contrary to the will of God, even if you're not looking for them. The more convenient our lives become, it seems, the more complacent we become in guarding our hearts and minds. [NOTE 1]

Paul's metaphor is thus an invitation for the church to band together to defeat the spiritual enemy that is always poised to strike at us. The Roman panoply was such that an individual soldier was protected only *so long as he stayed in ranks with his mates, their shields locked together*. The armor was designed *to protect only the front of the legionnaire and not his back*, which ensured that his front was always toward the enemy. If an individual broke ranks, either to fight on his own or to run, he was vulnerable. *The tech only works when it's used in community*.

We miss this reality, particularly because in our highly individualized, cell-phone-staring, button-pushing and thumb-twitching world we don't realize that we're only as good as the community of people around us. Ultimately, it wasn't the armor that saved the Roman soldier in battle; it was his connection to the others. I' depended upon his working together with the community, his teammates, his brothers in arms. [NOTE 2] Paul urges the church to suit up and check their connections to each other if they are to "withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (v. 13). The apostle then goes on to describe each piece of wearable tech that, when used together, makes for a strong defense against the forces of evil.

We will begin with the defensive tools or weapons. Paul starts with "**belt of truth**." It was the belt that held the soldier's tunic in place and from which his sword hung and which gave him freedom of movement. Truth is foundational to the strength of any group of people. The ability to trust one another and speak the truth is essential to both soldiers and churches (v. 14). The truth refers to Gods' truth revealed in the gospel and to truth as right living as a new creation in Christ. The Christian moves freely and quickly because he knows the truth. The belt of truth enables the community to "put away falsehood" that "leaves no room for the devil" to operate (vv. 25-26). Our gadgets can be used for gossip if we're not careful, so Paul begins with truth -- the wearable tech that is most protective of the cohesion of the community of faith.

Next Paul mentions the "**breastplate of righteousness**". It is interesting that both the breastplate of righteousness and the "**helmet of salvation**" (vv. 14, 17) are echoes from Isaiah 59:17, where God himself puts on the armor to go out and repay his enemies for their evil. God's righteousness and salvation guard our hearts and heads in the knowledge that he has already defeated the enemy through the righteousness and salvation offered by Christ on the cross. Like a heart rate monitor app on your smart watch, the knowledge of what God has done for us in Christ, revealed in the "word of God," helps us to gauge our spiritual health. The more we exercise the grace offered to us, the more likely we are to stay strong in the knowledge that we are eternally protected from the slings and arrows of the evil one. The purpose of the breastplate was to guard and protect the most vital parts of the body, so the Christian protects him/herself by righteousness. When a person is clothed with righteousness, they are impregnable, impenetrable. To put on the breastplate of righteousness that Christians are to reflect the righteous character of God in their actions by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now the breastplate of the Roman panoply was an early version of steel. But if Paul knew about Kevlar back in Bible times he might have written a Kevlar breastplate

of righteousness. First developed by DuPont in 1965 as a strong and durable replacement material for steel belts in racing-car tires, it's also used to make drumheads that resist all manner of pounding by head-banging heavy-metal drummers. Canoes made out of Kevlar, rather than fiberglass or aluminum, are a fraction of the weight. Kevlar has even been used as substitute for Teflon in non-stick frying pans. Yet, by far the best-known use of the synthetic material called Kevlar is in body armor for soldiers and police officers.

Kevlar's not a hard material: far from it. It's a flexible but very strong fiber that is light in weight making it perfect for wearable technology. It doesn't so much stop a bullet as absorb much of its impact. Old-fashioned metal armor -- the sort worn by knights in the Middle Ages -- worked differently. Its hard metal shell was meant to turn aside the strongest blow from a sword or lance, but -- once guns were invented -- its brittle nature made it vulnerable to bullets. Kevlar's different. It has some "give" to it. This makes it far more effective for protection against bullets. Kevlar's protection is counter-intuitive in that way.

Paul advises Christians to "put on the whole armor of God." Obviously, he never heard of Kevlar, but that material is probably a more accurate metaphor for the type of protection he's talking about. "A soft answer turns away wrath," says Proverbs 15:1. That's just the sort of energy-absorbing protection Christians need.

--For more on Kevlar, see the *Wikipedia.org* article of that name: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevlar>. Retrieved February 17, 2015.

Right here I am going to jump to verse 17 where Paul talks about the Helmet of salvation. The helmet protected the head, the nerve center of the body.

Paul saw the helmet of salvation, worn by the Christian soldier, as the guarantee of divine protection and ultimate deliverance. We think and do things differently when we know the end of the story. We win! The fact of our salvation means that our life is ultimately secure in Jesus Christ. Wearing this helmet, we can have confidence and boldness in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can have a confidence that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. So if God is for us, and the price is paid, and we can know that we are going to heaven when we die, it doesn't matter who or what might be against us.

The Roman "caliga," sandal, or **boot**, was one of the key parts of the panoply. It enabled the legion to keep pace on the march with more precision than the step counter on your belt. Here Paul uses the image to encourage the church to put on "whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace" (v. 15). The best defense is a good offense, thus the church that's constantly moving outside its walls to preach the gospel of peace in the community through both words and actions will be most equipped to "stand firm" even while moving out into the neighborhood. The sign of a true Christ follower is that he/she is eager to go and share the gospel. They see the Great Commission as a call to action and they act. It is not the great suggestion as indicated by our lack of action in this area.

The **shield** was a critical piece of the Roman panoply, since it provided the

primary protection for both the individual and the phalanx (which I hope you are remembering was the battle formation they used). Shooting flaming arrows into the enemy's ranks was a standard tactic in ancient warfare, since individual soldiers would have to drop their shields in order to put out the fire. The Romans devised the counter measure of soaking the leather-covered shields in water before battle in order to extinguish the fires before they got started. For the church, faith acts as a kind of shield against "the flaming arrows of the evil one" (v. 16). A strong faith is not just the product of individual devotion but is the result of a church that rallies together in defense of the gospel and holds up those who are struggling. Our relationship with Jesus is what protects us. We might not always be faithful but God is always faithful. When Paul talks about faith he is talking about trustful obedience with belief. He is talking about a committed, devoted, dependent relationship with Jesus Christ.

Then lastly we come to the offensive weapons, the "**sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God" (v. 17) and prayer. One of the upsides of having all this wearable tech is that we have easy access to Scripture in our pockets and on our wrists. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Scripture is a "sharp, two-edged sword" that cuts both ways -- it slices into the lies of the enemy and it can cut us to the heart when we are convicted of our sin (Hebrews 4:12). The more we engage in reading Scripture daily, the more we are able to see the enemy's catalog of temptations for doing evil for what they are: worthless junk that is harmful to both body and soul. The Word of God is our weapon of attack. It may be a word of comfort for one's emotional turmoil, it may be a word of hope for one's quivering soul, a word of condemnation for one's sin, a prophetic judgment for one's lack of involvement and insensitivity. It is the Word of God, our Bible, our only rule for faith and life, made alive by the Holy Spirit for building us up, for teaching and for encouragement.

And finally be watchful and pray. There is awesome power in prayer. In fact 1 John 5:14-15 tells us that if we pray anything whatsoever that is in line with God's will, we are guaranteed a positive answer! If you ask to be filled with the Spirit, God's Word tells us that you will be filled whether you deserve it or not, whether you feel anything or not, it will assuredly happen. If you continually put on the armor of God and make use of the Word of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit by praying to be filled and making time to listen, you **WILL STAND FIRM!**

There will always be new cool gadgets coming out, as long as creative people are looking for ways to make life better or easier. New inventions are popping up all the time, especially with the advent of crowdsourcing that allows others to invest in a good idea. Paul reminds us, however, that it's the tried and true products that really stand the test of time, especially when it comes to guarding our lives in Christ.

So now, what are you going to do about it? Please write down an "I will ..." statement that states what you will do this week to be better armed for battle against the evil one. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Paul’s Product Proposal” based on Ephesians 6: 10-20
Given at Doster Community Church on October 30, 2022

- I. The Roman panoply was designed specifically to work best when used in **community**. So suit up and check your connections to one another.
- II. Paul urges the church and suit up with the latest in wearable tech. First the defensive tools
 - a. The belt of truth
 - b. The breastplate of righteousness
 - c. The helmet of salvation
 - d. The boots of readiness to share the gospel
 - e. The Shield of faith
- III. Offensive weapons included the Sword of the Spirit and Prayer
- IV. What are you going to do about it? Please write an “I will ...” statement somewhere that states what you can do this week to be better armed for battle with satan and the forces of evil.