Ephesians 6:10-20 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 saints.

As Paul closes his epistle to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit leads him to instruct these believers about spiritual warfare and how to be prepared for it. There are many illustrations that Paul could have used to describe preparation for this struggle, but he chose the metaphor of armor. The armor of a Roman soldier would be common to the Ephesians as soldiers were very present in the Roman Empire. Thus, Paul describes the armor of these powerful soldiers that they would be so familiar, while drawing parallel to the spiritual armor (Armor of God) that the believer is to wear.

Before discussing the individual parts of this armor, we must first go back to the first mention of this armor in Ephesians 6:1 “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” The verb that Paul uses here to instruct believers to “put on” this armor carries with it the idea of once and for all permanence. It is not something that should be taken on and off at the Christian’s leisure, its presence on is us what protects the believer against the schemes of the devil. Satan is a real enemy and the Christian must be aware that he has crafty and deceptive schemes to harm the life of the believer and distract them from fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives. Therefore, these pieces of armor are essential to the life of a Christian seeking to bring glory and honor to God in the way that they live by fulfilling Christ’s commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

The six pieces of the armor of God can be broken into two distinct categories based on the verbs that are used to describe them. Those that are permanent (the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the gospel of peace) and those that are to be in the ready position for battle when the actual fighting takes place (the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit). Each piece of this armor is vital in living a gospel-centered life in this world.

The belt of truth might be better called the girdle of truth. Roman soldiers wore tunics which were outer garments that served as their primary covering. This piece of clothing draped over their bodies pretty loosely which could be a hindrance in battle. Therefore these soldiers
had a belt or girdle around their waists that they could tuck their tunics up into in order to run swiftly or battle. In the believer’s life, truth serves as this belt. This truth refers to a focus on the things that are real and right, it keeps the believer free from being entangled in the things of the world that Satan can use as a distraction from accomplishing God’s purposes. The believer must continue to remind themselves of and dwell on the truth to remain unencumbered by the things of the world.

The breastplate of righteousness is also crucial for the believer at all times. No soldier of this time would go into war without a strong piece of armor fastened on his torso. This piece of armor protected the vital organs of the one wearing it and would not be taken off. In the same way, a Christian’s life and heart ought to be protected by righteousness. This is not our own attempt at righteousness or legalism, which is of no value before God (Isaiah 64:6), but rather the righteousness that has been given to us by Christ (Romans 4:22-24). While this righteousness does not force us to live righteously, it does allow us to live this way and minimize our vulnerability to Satan’s attacks. We must seek to live righteous and obedient lives (Colossians 3:9-14) in the power of the Holy Spirit, that is to obey our Heavenly Father moment by moment.

The gospel of peace is the next piece of the armor that is to be permanently worn by the believer. The piece of armor that this would equate to would be the sandals that be worn by soldiers to protect their feet to allow them to move freely. A soldier with injured feet would be highly ineffective in battle, he would be likely to stumble and be defeated. In verse fifteen Paul says that our feet are to be “fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Solid footwear allows a soldier to be ready to respond to whatever comes, Paul calls these believers to the same readiness. The gospel of peace is the message that all believers have been made right (are at peace) with the God of the universe. This footwear allows us to stand confidently and be ready for whatever comes because we are at peace with God Almighty. Believers must understand and constantly remind themselves about the good news of the Gospel and its implications in their lives.

The shield of faith is one of the pieces of armor that must be at the ready for the purpose of extinguishing Satan’s flaming arrows. Roman soldiers would use several types of shields, but the one spoken of here by Paul (θυρεὸς) was about two and a half feet wide and four feet high. It was an amazing way for the soldier to defend himself and he could protect his entire body with it, even from arrows that would come flying overhead. These shields were often used by soldiers together on the front lines to provide a barricade of protection with the shields forming one larger shield as they stood side by side. In the believer’s life, this shield that protects form the attacks of the enemy is faith. Faith is believing God and that what He has said is true. It is only this confident expectation in God that allows the believer to survive the potentially deadly attacks of the enemy. Christians must consistently remind themselves of God’s unfailing faithfulness described in the Scriptures and demonstrated again and again in their own lives.

The helmet of Salvation is what protects our thinking as believers. The usefulness of the helmet for a soldier is obvious, it protects their head; no soldier of the time would consider
entering a warzone to battle without this crucial protection secured to his head. This helmet is
associated with salvation in the believer’s life, indicating that Satan will seek to attack the
Christian’s security and assurance in Christ by accusing him (Hebrews 12:10) and making him
focus in his sinfulness rather than the righteousness that he has in Christ. If these attacks are
successful the Christian’s thinking can be thrown into confusion and he will be ineffective in the
cause of advancing the gospel. If believers are fearful that they might not be saved they will
undoubtedly cease to seek to present the message of salvation to others. Christians must
constantly remind themselves of their right standing before God and operate with confidence
and leave no room in their thinking of the accusations of the enemy.

The final piece of armor is the sword of the Spirit. The sword that Paul refers to here is a
smaller sword (μαχαιρά), between six to eighteen inches in length, carried by Roman foot
soldiers and was the main weapon they would use in hand to hand combat. This defensive
armor and offensive weapon could be used by the soldier for a variety of purposes, not the
least of which was doing damage to the enemy. The phrase “of the Spirit” can also be
translated “by the Spirit” referring to the nature of the sword. Paul states clearly that this
sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. In many ways God’s Word is a Swiss Army Knife in the
believer’s life, God’s Word is useful for so many things (2 Timothy 3:16-17). While the truth of
the Word of God is extremely useful for defending against the attacks of the enemy it also is an
offensive weapon in that it is the very Word of God that presented by His followers and
empowered by His Spirit changes the heart of the unbeliever, thus delivering a great blow to
Satan in this spiritual conflict.

The final instruction that Paul gives in verses eighteen through twenty is directed
towards the subject of prayer. The believer must be in prayer in the midst of the Spiritual battle
as that constant communication with God will serve as a reminder of the armor that is the
believer’s in Christ. It is by remaining in Christ (John 15:1-17) through intimate relationship that
we are sustained in spiritual battle and that these pieces are armor are truly most effective.
Christians must consistently seek relationship with Christ and be aware of the Spiritual battle
that they are engaged in. If those two things happen, the believer will be able to be strong in
the Lord and withstand the schemes of the devil.