

“A Wardrobe of Shalom”

Ephesians 6:10-20

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We are encouraged to wear a wardrobe of shalom. The word shalom is abundant with meaning. Shalom is peace, fullness, abundant life, being whole, love, completeness and joy. Every day we have choices regarding how much of the wardrobe of shalom we will wear.

The wardrobe of shalom protects us from evil. Fear and hate are the core of all evil. The Apostle Paul identifies manifestations of fear and hate in the fifth chapter of Galatians, impure thoughts, idolatry, greed, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, divisions, and feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group. If we daily choose to wear the wardrobe of shalom, then we share the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. God gives us free will. We are constantly making choices and thinking thoughts that will result in evil or Spirit fruit.

Putting on the wardrobe of shalom enables us to more often choose love. The Apostle Paul compares the wardrobe of shalom to the armor of the Roman soldier. These soldiers served together and wore armor to protect Roman citizens. We are called to serve together and wear the wardrobe of shalom to protect our lives and the world from fear and hate. The persistent attacks of fear and hate can easily penetrate our hearts and minds if we do not serve together and receive God's direction and help.

Roman armor was effective for the individual soldier only if they locked their shields together. If a soldier broke rank to fight or flee they were vulnerable. The soldiers trusted their leader to position them in the right place and their fellow soldiers to protect their area, because there was little protection from behind. The Roman soldiers were only as good as the community of people around them. Ultimately the armor only protected them if they remained connected to one another.

The Apostle Paul wrote. **Ephesians 6:10-20 “Be strong in the Lord and in God’s mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. For shoes, put on the readiness to preach the Good News of peace with God. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain the mystery of the gospel which is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God’s ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for God, as I should.”**

Homiletics magazine emphasizes choosing to put on the “belt of truth that 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.”

Thomas Aquinas echoes the importance of making choices that protect us spiritually. His top five are: 1. Purity of heart. 2. Keeping the commandments. 3. Reformation of the tongue. 4. Love of God and neighbor. 5. Praising God.

John Chrysostom focuses on the protection of the “Word of God” writing, “While there are many medicines and other aids to help the body in times of illness, the only cure for spiritual ailments, wounds and diseases is the Word of God.” The Word is our vital protection.

There is only offensive piece of armor, the sword of the Holy Spirit. Swords have two edges that cut both ways. One side cuts into the lies of hate and fear. The other side cuts out the fear, hate, and sin in us. The more we use the sword of the Holy Spirit the more we can see the destructive facets of fear and hate that is harming others and ourselves.

William Temple urges us to utilize the shield of faith to enjoy peace. “The shield of faith is true trust in the one genuine God. If one does not know God, then they cannot trust God. People long for peace but there will be no enduring peace if people do not commit themselves to trusting God.”

John Henry Jowett puts on the shield of faith to protect his soul from negativity, so he can be joyful and loving. The shield of faith provides spiritual protection. Jowett wrote, “Many Christians, however, are prone to focus on the outward and physical life, so we seek our shields in that outward and physical realm. We want a shield against the physical pains of the world. We live in circumstances and seek a shield to make us comfortable; but the apostle Paul lived in character and sought a shield to make him holy.” Jowett illustrates his point, “A ray of white light contains many colors, and humans have devised ways to filter out some of the colors while retaining others. Likewise, for Paul the shield of faith served as a filter or screen against that which would weaken him spiritually. At the same time, the shield allowed Paul to receive that which was spiritually illuminating and warming. Paul did not want a shield against failure. He wanted a shield against pessimism that can grow out of failure. Paul did not want a shield against pain and injury. He wanted a shield against the negative attitudes and behaviors that can arise from pain and injury. Paul did not want a shield against success. He wanted a shield against the pride that people sometimes extract from success. The shield of faith enables us to develop an intimate relationship with Christ. If we want to wear the shield of faith, we need to develop that relationship. This faith-life, then, helps us to put as top priorities treasures related to the soul. Finally, the faith-life enables us to see the whole spiritual campaign rather than fixating on the success or failure of any one battle. When our spiritual lives are full of perils and discouragements, the shield of faith helps us to be tough, resilient, and buoyant by helping us to see that joy supernal will rise with the dawn.”

The armor of God is truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, prayer, being Spirit filled and the word of God. How would you compare these items to your work or a sport you enjoy?

Paul Colton invited me this summer to join team Colton Brothers in riding RAGBRAI—the *Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa*. If that other great Paul, the Apostle Paul, rode in RAGBRAI perhaps his message would be, put on the bicycling gear of God.

The Apostle Paul urges us to be strong in the Lord for we cannot live abundantly without God. God is always with us, loves us, and supplies everything we truly need. On RAGBRI the person that was most like God was our driver, Coleen Colton. Coleen was always there for us. She knew the route, dropped us off at great locations, and always found us in the crowd to take us home. Coleen smiled and encouraged us. Every morning she went through the list of essential items with us, which was crucial, because at least one of us forgot at least one item every day. God is smiling because of you. God is encouraging you. God loves you, knows what is best for you. God is offering you all you truly need. God always knows exactly where you are and the way to abundant life.

The water of faith. We consumed huge quantities of water. It is essential to drink regularly and before one is thirsty. The last day on the blacktop it was over 100 degrees. Sweat poured out of us to keep us cool. Without water we quickly would have become ill, unable to bike. Faith is our connection with God. Faith is our relationship with God that invigorates us. Jesus is living water for each of us. Faith enables us to receive God's blessings, so we can keep going through demanding circumstances. Faith fills us with love so we are able to love. Without faith one is not connected to the source of all life, blessings, and love. Without faith in God one becomes sick, restless, bitter, wounded, hateful, and afraid.

The sunglasses of truth. Sunglasses enable you to see the route and each other clearly. Sunglasses protect your eyes from dirt, debris, and bugs. If you cannot see, then a painful crash will happen. Truth enables us to see each other as beloved masterpieces created in God's image with gifts and abilities. Truth reveals that we need each other, everyone to share, so together we can love extravagantly building each other up into the likeness of Jesus. Without truth, division, discord, and hate grow resulting in painful community.

The shoes of peace. Shoes transfer the power of one's body to the bike where it is multiplied, enabling one to travel further and faster. It is impossible to understand the enormity or communicate the vastness of what is happening here. We try to convey it as peace, shalom, the gospel, holiness, good news. It is God creating a good world. It is Jesus revealing God's redeeming love. It is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is perceiving a wonderful facet of God and then sharing it which blesses others and oneself deeper than one could ever do by oneself.

The helmet of salvation. Whenever a cyclist makes a mistake causing a fall, the helmet protects them so they can ride again. Salvation is the saving love of God, God's grace. Every time we make a mistake, fail to love or be loved, sin, God forgives us and gives us another chance.

The jersey of righteousness. My bike jersey covers up my blinding white skin and flabby torso greatly improving my appearance. Our sin makes all of us unsightly. Jesus justifies us by imputing his righteousness into our lives. Jesus covers all of our faults and scars making us beautiful. Jesus brings out the best in us.

The sunscreen of prayer. Without sunscreen I quickly burn and become miserable. Prayer changes us making us more caring, compassionate, and eager to serve. Without prayer one becomes burned by all that is not right with the world which will make them a miserable person.

The food of the word of God. The first day after forty some miles of riding and about fifteen miles from our destination Paul said, "We need to stop and get some food." Paul noticed

that I was slowing down and didn't look so good. After eating, Paul's brother, Mark, found a place for us to replenish in the shade. I did not eat enough that day. I needed food to fuel my body. Jesus is the bread of life. Without the encouragement, wisdom, and guidance of God's word one quickly runs out of strength. We celebrate the Lord's Supper together, inviting, preparing, and serving each other the bread of life. At times each of us will run out of energy then another helps us. At times each of us will be full of energy, then we help those who around us.

The bike of the Holy Spirit. A bike multiplies your fitness. If one's fitness is good, you are able to go far fast and zip over every hill. If one's fitness is poor, the bike will reveal your lack of fitness with every stroke, every hill seems like a mountain. The Holy Spirit makes us aware of our shortcomings, weaknesses, and ways we need to grow. The Holy Spirit multiples every goodness filling the world with love, joy, peace, kindness, and goodness.

The bike gloves and shorts of gratitude. Bike gloves and shorts minimize the bumps, vibrations, and chafing enabling one to be a joyful biker. Gratitude did not make the Apostle Paul's list of essential armor. Every day has bumps which are often beyond our control; however, we get to choose our attitude, how we will view matters, and how we will respond. Being grateful for what we have. Being grateful to God and those who love us inspires us to endure every bump and find the joy in living.

The Apostle Paul concludes by asking everyone to care for, encourage, and support each other. On RAGBRAI, I was surprised by how easy and enjoyable it was to go faster and further than I bike when I am alone. My conversations with Paul propelled me. Riding in the midst of around 15,000 riders encouraged me, we cheered for each other, pointed out obstacles, helped one another, and kept each other safe. A variety of vendors such as my favorite, Mr. Porkchop, kept us nourished and hydrated. Police protected us from wild cars. Communities literally rolled out the red carpet and struck up the band. People came out to cheer for us. Others offered to refresh us with a spray of water. Garrett cheered for us at the finish line. It was a wonderful experience I will treasure. Church, school, work, every group should encourage, support, and bring out the best in one another. Our love for each other should inspire great products, services, education, art, music, literature, and every goodness. Our words should refresh filling others with joy. Our actions should inspire ever growing love. Our community should protect us, heal each other, and cloth us with the wardrobe of shalom.

Soon we will celebrate baptism. The water symbolizes the Holy Spirit and filling us with love, joy, and every blessing of God. The water symbolizes the Holy Spirit clothing us in the wardrobe of shalom. Amen