



PROTECTED AND PROGRESSING

WEEK 8
04.24.16

FOCUS VERSE

Ephesians 6:15

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

LESSON TEXT

Psalm 34:14

14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Proverbs 16:7

7 When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Matthew 5:9

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Mark 9:50

50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

Romans 12:18

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Romans 14:19

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

I Thessalonians 5:15

15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

II Timothy 2:22

22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

James 3:17–18

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

I Peter 3:11

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God provides a covering to equip and protect the feet—the gospel of peace—to give stability and mobility that allow the believer flexibility to move and advance as God directs.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Speech that Melted an Iron Curtain

A small Presbyterian college, Westminster, is located in rural Fulton near the center of Missouri. In 1946 President Harry S. Truman and Sir Winston Churchill traveled to Fulton to speak for the Westminster graduation. There Churchill gave his famous “Iron Curtain” speech. Before the speech, economic concerns dominated foreign policy, and the Soviet Union was still viewed as an ally. Largely because of this one speech, Churchill changed the way the West viewed the Communist states and reset foreign policy for the next half century. The Soviet Union denounced the speech as “war mongering,” and imperialist “racism,” while the United States embraced the warning and began actively resisting Soviet territorial and ideological expansion.

In 1990 Ronald Reagan went to Westminster to dedicate the sculpture “Breakthrough”

created by Churchill’s granddaughter Edwina Sandys from eight sections of the recently dismantled Berlin Wall. Two years later, against the backdrop of this sculpture, Mikhail Gorbachev stood at the same podium used by Churchill and proclaimed the end of the Cold War.

Over the years, numerous world leaders have accepted invitations to speak at an otherwise insignificant college in rural Missouri, and in doing so they have been heard by the world. Like Churchill, Christians have a vital message that cannot wait for a world stage. Jesus said, “Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops” (Luke 12:3, ESV). When given a candle, don’t wait for a spotlight.

OUTLINE

I. THE FEET NEED PROTECTION

- A. Protection by the Gospel
- B. Protection by Peace

II. THE PARADOX OF THE GOSPEL

- A. Protected
- B. Progressing

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

As we seek to understand the Scriptures and to apply them to our lives, we frequently encounter principles that seem at first glance to be in opposition to one another. There is a tension, as it were, between this set of verses and what it teaches and another set of verses and its collective instruction. One pulls toward one way of thinking and the other in a different direction.

With just a surface analysis for instance, there seems to be a tension between mercy and justice, between having an appropriate fear of God and having unreserved intimacy with Him, or between our relationship with God being that of a servant and that of a son.

In reality, the Scriptures are in perfect unity. These apparent “conflicts” can readily be understood and properly framed when the entirety of God’s Word is considered and balanced against itself. These topics compel us to dig a little deeper in our study and meditation.

Such a tension exists between the necessity of standing our ground for Christ and yet advancing fearlessly for Him—that we remain steadfast and unmovable while we are always going forward. We are to guard carefully the spiritual treasures we have while we consistently seek to acquire greater and greater riches in the Kingdom. We are pulled one way to simply fortify and protect, and we are pulled another way to fortify and progress. It is possible for the blood-washed child of God to be both protected and progressing. A key to this seeming conflict is found in that portion of the armor of God applied to our feet—the preparation of the gospel of peace. In that portion of our armament we find how to shelter those items of value we possess while actively and militantly advancing to new places in Christ Jesus.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE FEET NEED PROTECTION

The Bible uses many different images to clarify the multifaceted nature of our relationship with the Lord. As stated above, we are called both His servants and His children. But we are also likened to subjects in His kingdom, members of His body, and building elements in His temple along with other things.

Not the least among these depictions is that of a soldier. The church is certainly not some sort of paramilitary force in this world. Indeed we are clearly instructed against violence in most situations. Even when someone wrongs us, we should suffer quietly rather than retaliate. “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (I Thessalonians 5:15).

So while we, as individuals or the church collectively, are not to engage in aggression in the natural realm, still a part of our spiritual makeup is one of warring and violence. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). We are to “fight the good fight of faith” (I Timothy 6:12). While we do not wrestle against natural enemies, we do fight against principalities and spiritual powers. (See Ephesians 6:12.)

Therefore as faithful soldiers in God’s army, we can glean much from the skills, values, and equipment of a natural soldier. To the casual observer, it is apparent that soldiers in a combat environment have two primary objectives—to inflict harm on the enemy and to protect themselves from harm. Advanced clothing, protective helmets, bulletproof armament, protective eyewear, durable gloves, and so forth all combine to make a modern soldier as impervious to injury as possible while enabling him to overcome his adversaries as quickly as possible.

Among the vital, protective gear a soldier wears is his sturdy and robust footwear. Soldiers do not wear flip-flops. They wear combat boots. The reason is self-evident. A soldier who cannot walk is a soldier destined for defeat. A soldier unsteady on his feet is neither able to withstand his enemy’s assault nor poised to ably launch an attack against

him. In order to effectively carry out the battle plans, he must have secure footing that provides both stability and mobility as needed. So though they may not be glamorous, the feet are quite important to battlefield survival and success.

Protection of the feet depends on how they are covered and where they stand. A soldier engaging his enemy must have a solid foundation from which to fight. Otherwise he can readily be thrown off balance, brought down, and destroyed. It is no different for a child of God engaging spiritual enemies. He will not be able to carry out his Commander’s orders if his footing is weakened either by inadequate covering or by improper placement. A deficiency in either will result in a lack of balance, a fall, and potential destruction.

Gratefully, the latter is thoroughly addressed in Scripture. We have a stable and certain foundation from which to fight. After having named two who stood in opposition to the gospel, Paul made it clear that conflict did not weaken his footing. He was standing on a firm foundation. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure” (II Timothy 2:19).

We can claim that same promise, for we stand and face our enemy with a foundation that is nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11). Jesus Christ provides an immovable base on which our feet can stand. That foundation is more than just His name; it also is comprised of the entirety of His message. Paul clarified this in Ephesians 2:20: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” What the prophets foretold and what the apostles preached about Him remains the platform on which we stand and from which we advance on Satan’s kingdom. His gospel both protects and propels us!

A. Protection by the Gospel

As Paul delineated the armor that equips a child of God, he did not neglect our feet. They are shod, according to Ephesians, with the “preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). Alternate renderings of this verse refer to a “readiness” to declare His gospel or our doing what is necessary to “be prepared

to preach” His gospel. In summary, however, our connection to the gospel and our willingness to share it protects our footing.

We should never underestimate the value of the gospel. Neither should we misunderstand it. The gospel is not found in Acts 2:38. The gospel is not a list of instructions we are to follow. The gospel, which is good news, is about what He has already done! “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:1–4). The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that He died for our sins, was buried, and then rose again! Acts 2:38 is a description of how the gospel is applied to our lives.

The gospel is not simply something a sinner is to believe as true and then stop there. The gospel is to be obeyed. “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thessalonians 1:7–8).

Obedience to the gospel requires faith to be demonstrated through actions. We will associate with His death through repentance, we will be buried with Him in baptism, and then we will walk in resurrection power with Him through the baptism of the Holy Ghost! (See Acts 2:38.) The gospel, and our willingness to declare it, protects our footing in an unstable world.

The pages of history are populated with the tragic tales of those who thought His gospel could be set aside for one reason or another. Once that is done, individuals leave themselves extremely vulnerable to spiritual attack. Their feet are unprotected. The gospel no longer covers their spiritual footing, nor are they standing on the foundation the apostles laid. They are susceptible to falling when they abandon the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not an insignificant influence. In our culture, some have mistakenly deemed the gospel as a weak and fragile force, more the product of creative, religious minds than of the very plan of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. His gospel is rugged and enduring. It is living and everlasting. So powerful is His gospel that the vilest sinner can have just one obedient interaction with it and be eternally changed! Sin is subject to its might. Hell cannot resist it. Death is conquered by it. And no skeptic can quiet its influence.



**Last eve I paused beside the
blacksmith’s door**

**And heard the anvil ring the vesper
chime;**

**Then looking in I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn with beating years
of time.**

**“How many anvils have you had,”
said I,**

**“To wear and batter all these hammers
so?”**

**“Just one,” said he, and then with
twinkling eye,**

**“The anvil wears the hammers out,
you know.”**

**And so I thought, The anvil of God’s
Word**

**For ages skeptic blows have beat
upon;**

**Yet though the noise of falling blows
was heard,**

**The anvil is unharmed, the hammers
gone!**

—John Clifford, D. D.

The Christian who would have his feet and footing protected must do so in part by remaining true to the gospel, for there is no alternative. If a deceptive “spiritual footwear salesman” should ever attempt to convince someone otherwise, that person should heed the words of Paul to the church in Galatia. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so

say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8–9). No other gospel, so called, can protect one’s standing before God or in the face of his enemy. But an unwavering commitment to His gospel will protect our feet and equip us to progress.

B. Protection by Peace

While the gospel is certainly strong and tough enough to withstand all tests of time, it is neither abrasive nor unkind. The gospel confronts us as we are and compels us to change, but it is not cruel or heartless. And neither should we, whose feet are shod by it, be. His gospel is good news bathed in peace. Paul said our feet are properly shod when the gospel we bear is marked by peace.

It is a blight on the name of Christ when any who have been liberated by a gospel of peace would attempt then to preach a gospel known for contention and strife. Some have mistakenly carried the gospel with aggression driven by pride rather than with humility driven by gratitude. Yes, His people must always stand for the gospel without compromise, but this can be done with a peaceful spirit, a gentle countenance, and kind words. Nothing about His gospel demands that we fight and strive.

In fact, we may simply declare His gospel and let it do its own work. Charles Spurgeon is quoted as saying, “Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it, and it will defend itself!” We are to fight Hell by declaring the gospel, but we are not to fight people in doing so. Our feet are made vulnerable if we are shod with a gospel of strife or a gospel of conflict. When, however, we are standing on and walking in a gospel that is peaceful in its presentation and yet powerful in its performance, our feet are protected in this battle.

Sometimes, however, the simple declaration of the gospel with the most peaceful spirit and the purest motive can produce a boisterous, even unkind, response. Paul, who admonished us to have our feet shod with peace, experienced such. His preaching in Jerusalem produced what the Bible called a “tumult.” In various locations His preaching stirred up the people until they threatened

violence and often carried it out. Yet the gospel he preached was itself one of peace!

In his writing to the church of Rome, Paul presented this principle: “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Romans 10:15). He was drawing from the words of Isaiah. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth” (Isaiah 52:7). Both Isaiah the prophet and Paul the apostle agreed that peace would mark the gospel of God’s kingdom and would have an effect on the feet of the one declaring it!

In order to carry a peaceful gospel, we must be peaceful people. To that end, the baptism of the Holy Ghost instills in us a new kingdom characterized by that very attribute. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). We must proclaim His gospel through the power of His Spirit, and that Spirit manifests itself in peace.

Our standing before God is protected by a close, scriptural link between righteousness and peace. These two elements of God’s kingdom work in tandem. If we are righteous, then we will manifest peace. The psalmist said, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10).

In fact, none of us can lay claim to being in right standing before God if we are not manifesting God’s peace in our lives and ministry interactions with others. Just as we have been made righteous through the work of the gospel in our lives, so we have been commanded to allow that righteousness to demonstrate itself in a peaceful spirit. “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18).

As people of protected feet, we lay aside excuses and self-justified defenses. We abandon rights. We absorb tension, turn the other cheek, love our enemies, and forgive seventy times seven times daily. In other words, we seek to follow the admonition of Paul to the church in Rome. “If it be possible, as much as

lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). In so doing, we ensure nothing can offend us to the point of falling. Our feet are protected by a gospel of peace, and that protection affords us security in His work.

II. THE PARADOX OF THE GOSPEL

As stated earlier, this protection for our footing accomplishes two objectives, which are not contradictory but rather complimentary. The gospel of peace protects us from falling by providing a solid, immovable foundation on which to stand. But it further gives us traction for advancement so we may progress both in our walk with God and in our work for Him. We are equipped to stand and to walk. To resist and to advance. To diligently refuse to be pushed backward while purposely resolving to move forward. We are protected so we may progress.

A. Protected

An enemy is aligned against us whose purpose is clearly defined by the Scriptures: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). Satan is bent on the complete destruction of every child of God. He will take what he can from us. What he cannot take he will seek to slaughter. What he cannot kill, he will attempt to ruin to render it unfit for its divine purpose. We are absolutely engaged in a battle in which our enemy is more than willing and capable of being the aggressor.

Gratefully, in the face of a withering and daily assault, we are given protection. The armor of God in general and the gospel of peace in particular provide for us safety against his attacks. Our footing is sure. Our foundation will never move or crumble. Small wonder then the psalmist declared, “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved” (Psalm 121:3).

We are protected! God is our shield, our fortress, our high tower, our bulwark, and our refuge. “For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock” (Psalm 27:5). Note once again this “hiding” is framed in the context of our solid foundation. We are protected by our footing.

What is the purpose of this armor we have been discussing? The Bible tells us distinctly:

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:11, 13). The defined purpose of the armor we wear is to protect us so we may stand against the evil one and so we may withstand an evil day. It protects us from falling in the face of Satan’s attacks.

B. Progressing

Not for a moment should we assume that simply because we are equipped to stand against his attacks, we are merely passive survivors in this spiritual conflict. Far from that, we are declared to be more than conquerors! (See Romans 8:37.) God fully anticipates His children marching victoriously into the enemy’s camp. He equips our feet not merely for standing, but for stepping forward into new efforts, new ministries, new territories, and so forth.

God’s kingdom is one of unending expansion. Isaiah foretold hundreds of years before Christ’s birth: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6–7). Please note once again this close connection between peace and the ability to progress.

Daniel saw this same growth pattern in his vision. After declaring to Nebuchadnezzar the vision he had of an image with a golden head, arms and breast of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay, Daniel described one last image reflective of Christ’s coming kingdom. “The stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). (See also Daniel 2:44.)

In that we are citizens of and workers in a kingdom that will grow to fill the whole earth, it is not unreasonable to think God wants each of us to grow individually as well. In fact, it is necessary for a Christian to grow; if we are not growing, we are in the process of dying. If we are not advancing, we are in truth retreating. There is no static, stationary place in God’s kingdom. “Furthermore then we beseech you,

brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (I Thessalonians 4:1).

God has not protected our feet with a powerful, peaceful gospel exclusively so we can stand against the enemy’s attacks and remain saved. He has protected our feet so we may move forward and bring the battle against the devil’s kingdom. Each child of God should be growing daily in the knowledge of Christ and in the practical application of how to live for Him. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It would be easier for an army to simply hold its territory against the attack of an enemy than to ever have designs on seizing new territory. It could merely barricade itself behind strong walls and mighty gates and refuse to risk an encounter on the battlefield. It could choose security over victory.

In like fashion, perhaps it is easier in some regards for a child of God merely to exist and not grow. There is less work and less chance

of being assailed by an angry enemy when we hide behind our existing level of devotion and do not threaten him by increasing our commitment, deepening our prayer life, increasing our giving, expanding our knowledge of God’s Word, and broadening our ministry involvement.

When that temptation presents itself, we would be well served to look down at our spiritual feet. They are not unprotected, as the power of a gospel of peace covers them. We are able to stand with a solid foundation, but we are shod for something much more than that. We are protected so we can progress.

Each year of our spiritual journey should be marked by more intimacy with Him. Each turn of the calendar page should find us more spiritually minded. Each season should see us less connected to this world. Progress and advancement should be the hallmarks of our Christian life.

But progression does not happen in leaps and bounds. It occurs one step at a time, as protected feet set their direction toward Him. Clothe your feet with the peaceful gospel of Jesus Christ, refuse to be knocked from that solid foundation, and then purpose to take practical steps toward Him daily. ■

REFLECTIONS

- How are the feet vital in battle? What is the significance of their needing protection? Discuss.
- How well do you believe you can explain the gospel and our required response to it from the Scriptures? Make a list of five verses you need to commit to memory to be able to more ably present the gospel to a lost soul. Memorize one each day this week.
- What areas of your life or relationships lack peace? How can you introduce God’s peace into those situations? What practical steps can you take this week to better protect your spiritual stance?
- What is the proper balance between being protected and progressing? How can we do both at the same time? Discuss.
- Name one area of your spiritual development that needs to progress immediately. What practices can you introduce into your daily life this week to begin advancement in that area?