

# Life in the Roman Empire: Episode 198

## Walking the "Roman Street" in Ephesus

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Most Jesus followers recognize the imagery in the last part of that letter, where Paul drew from a Roman soldier's armor to address God's spiritual weaponry for a believer. What may surprise you, is **the rest of the letter appears set in first century Roman imagery as well.**

For the purposes of this talk, let's divide the letter into three parts.

- The first part dealt with the **CALL** of a Jesus follower (in Ephesians 1-3).
- The second part dealt with the **CONDUCT** of a Jesus follower (in 4:1-6:19).
- That third section dealt with the **CONFLICT** of the Jesus follower in 6:20-30, and along with a few end notes it drew a picture of God's provided armor.

The Epistle was written during Paul's "light chain" arrest, awaiting time to be questioned by Emperor Nero, during the years around 61-62 CE.

### ***The Call of the Jesus Follower (Ephesians 1-3)***

During Paul's life, the Roman army was in its first half century of existing as a fully state-paid force, supported by tax revenues. Conquering armies typically included enveloping their structure and adopting new people into Roman identity. Barbarians were brought in to the legions, and this so-called "**making of a Roman**" became a known process for transforming the identity of men from barbarian fighters to disciplined Roman soldiers. That **process appears to offer the imagery in the first part of Ephesians...** At the same time, Paul read reports from small developing churches among the Gentiles. **Teachers from Judea were assailing the small flocks with the notion that God wanted all Gentiles to become Jews to in turn be followers of the Hebrew Messiah.** This appears a parallel problem.

In response, Paul used *terminology* and *imagery* from the army of Rome as the base for his encouragement and instruction to the Ephesians.

### ***How were barbarians transformed into subjects of the Empire?***

- **First**, they were **adopted** (1:5) and chosen by a known Roman gens or clan and **offered a basic education in their new identity as Romans** (cp. 2:19 "no longer strangers"). They were expected to cease living as a barbarian, and understand their natural place in the **order of the society** (cp. Ephesians 1:5; 2:12,19). They also needed to understand those in stations above and below them (cp. Ephesians 3:10).
- **Second**, they were **offered a piece of land in token form** (a deposit of their Roman **inheritance**; cp. Ephesians 1:14) for the first time in their lives (as many were from roving and foraging tribal bands).
- **Third**, they were **taught how to act as a true Roman**, and how to become a "civilized" citizen (cp. "walk worthy" in Ephesians 4:1, 17-23).
- **Fourth**, they **observed public "pompa" and learned the blessing of Roman unity and expansion** (4:4-

10) procession as spoils of war.

- **Fifth**, they were told how to **dress** as a Roman (cp. 4:22 “put off clothing of old self...”)
- **Sixth, they observed Romans of standing and were told to mimic** their behaviors in public settings (etiquette, etc; cp. 5:1 “imitators”)
- **Seventh, they were trained in their rank** (cp. 5:22 “be subject”) and often **given work as a soldier** (Ephesians 4:8; 6:10ff). Though some served in key positions (some Emperors chose foreigners as personal guards), for the most part, they were given service positions of a lower station.

Paul wrote the letter to address specific issues that affected the progress of the church (i.e. Judaizers) and to express a depth of thought on the work of Jesus and its implications in the contemporary church (i.e. living out great truths).

**The call of the believer section** laid out two truths:

- First, the “pig-eating pagans” that became Christians were an intentional part of God’s program, and in no way inadequate to be saved – but they needed to understand God’s intentions for them.
- Second, God fully assimilated them into the family, with a familiar process and familiar markers. There are nearly a dozen such images in the section, like adoption and tokening, etc. that are designed to connect the assimilation process.

### ***The Conduct of a Jesus Follower (Ephesians 4:1-6:9)***

The second part of the letter focused on the CONDUCT or BEHAVIOR of a follower of Jesus, where **Paul used the term “WALK” repeatedly between Ephesians 4:1-6:9.**

The first use of “walk” had **two balancing images** that was familiar to an urban Roman, and there Paul offered the first of the five “walks” in Ephesians 4:1-3:

- Image #1: The image of the FORUM SLAVE MARKET in Ephesian 4:1-3
- Image #2: Virs Triumphalis: The image of the TRIUMPH (VICTORY PARADE) in Ephesians 4:7-13.
- Image #3: The image of the THERMAE (ROMAN BATH) in Ephesians 4:17-24.
- Image #4: An Image from the ROMAN THEATRE in Ephesians 5:1-6.
- Image #5: The Vigiles (NIGHT WATCHMEN) of Roman Street in Ephesians 5:7-14.
- Image #6: The ROMAN PUB (Popinae) in Ephesians 5:15-21.

### ***The Conflict of Jesus Followers (Ephesians 6:10-20)***

**The third part of the book, the CONFLICT of the believers is set out in military imagery.** The *armor of the Roman soldier* illustrated the protective covering God provided a believer. How?

- By using the resources God gave them (11);
- By identifying the real enemy (11b-12);
- By deliberately putting on all the protection provided by God (13).

**The FIRST TYPE was that armor which must always be at the ready.** If there was a lull in the battle, the

fighter was not to remove the first three implements. He indicated that in the verb form “always having” the:

- **Belt of truthfulness:** (alethia: truth as content) vulnerable area, carefully protected (14); Paul was not addressing the truth of salvation (as in v. 17 and the sword, Word), but rather the commitment to truthfulness of the believer!
- **Breastplate of righteousness (holy choices):** covering heart, able to take direct blows when positioned correctly (14b), breaks your heart when not maintained. In the Hebrew world, the “heart” is the mind! (Prov. 23:7; Mark 7:21). Paul does not refer to self righteousness (Eph. 2:8-9), nor of imputed righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), but of a life practice of righteousness, or holy living.
- **Sandal guard straps fixed in position to provide a firm stand with the Gospel:** metal tabs that protected the surface of the foot with cleats to hold the soldier in place. Paul refers to the unmovable faith in the Gospel to bring peace in the life of the lost.

**The SECOND TYPE of armor was indicated in the words “Above all” (v.16).** The grammar does NOT appear to indicate the shield is *more important*, but is linked to the verb form of all of the next three items. They were to appropriate at the time necessary the:

- **Blocking shield of faith:** (theuron; large shield to block arrows; 4.5 feet by 2.5 feet., cp. Psalm 18:30). His reference is not to “belief” as such, but to “trust” that changes our view of ourselves and the world around us. When the battle rages, use the shield. 1) they were effective when locked together; 2) they were effective when held tightly and trusted and all remained in place.
- **Helmet of salvation:** (refers to the protection of the transformed mind) when we understand that our salvation has a PAST aspect: justification; a PRESENT aspect: sanctification; and a FUTURE aspect, our eventual glorification. We must see things through God’s eyes and learn to call the battle by His Word!
- **Sword of the Spirit:** the WORD (RAMA: From the word “to pour, an utterance”) of God. The “machaira” dagger is not the broad sword, rhomphaia). A specific Word from God that He gives to take a direct shot at the enemy!

### ***How can believers use the armor? (18)***

It is used in prayer (ask God for what we need). Believers use it when they persevere in troubles. Believers use it when they stand with one another in love.

### ***Summary***

Paul pressed a simple case to the beleaguered Ephesians. They were Divinely called to a new citizenship, carefully selected to depart the ranks of pagan barbarians and offered the chance to become a soldier in the great Kingdom of God. They were recruited into an army for which they had to serve faithfully with the equipment provided them. They could not allow the jeering of others to allow them to be derailed in their service of the King! They were not second to Jewish believers; they were to assimilate into the Kingdom while appreciating the unique nature of the choice God had made on their behalf. They were not encouraged to disparage God’s commitment to Jewish believers, but rather to walk in God’s unique commitment to them.

### ***Additional Implications:***