
THE METAPHORS OF PAUL'S WRITINGS

DAVID A. LEFEVRE, EDUCATION WEEK, PROVO 2012

DAY 4: WAR, WORSHIP, AND SPORTS

INTRODUCTION

WAR

TACTICS

Acts 24:5 Speaking against Paul in Ceasarea, Tertullus accused him of several things, including being a 'front liner' for the Nazarenes, meaning he was leading the charge.

1 Corinthians 14:40 When they worship, do it in proper, organized battle array.

1 Corinthians 15:23 Christ leads the charge in the battle, a 'resurrection army.'

Galatians 5:25 Keep in step with the Spirit who is leading the charge and setting the pace.

SIEGE

1 Corinthians 10:3-6 Siege tactics and weaponry are compared to the battle for men's souls.

SIGNALS AND WATCHES

1 Corinthians 14:8 Good gifts help the Church more than less helpful ones.

1 Corinthians 15:52 The trumpet calls the army to battle, signals to break camp, and calls for advance/retreat. So in the resurrection we will be called to rise up.

Philippians 4:6-7 The Holy Spirit guards/garrisons us to protect as we give our supplications to God.

ARMOR

Romans 13:11-12 As the night ends, the army is told to cast off any dark things that happened during the darkness and instead put on the armor of light. Each morning we are called to 'put on Christ' and thus live as Christ each day.

Ephesians 6:10-17 The body armor of the Roman soldier comprised a pair each of back and front metal plates, a set of curved metal strips over the shoulders, and a leather apron, covered on the outside by six or seven horizontal strips of metal. The apron hung from a belt at the waist. The head

was covered by a metal helmet, with a projecting plate at the back to protect the neck. The face was protected by cheek plates hinged at the top of the helmet. A short woolen tunic and loincloth were worn beneath the armor. Sandals studded with hobnails completed the outfit. The thongs of the sandals were wound halfway up the shin and tied. In cold climates the legionaries were permitted to wrap their feet in wood and to wear knee-length trousers. Occasionally, a heavy cloak was also worn. Each man carried on his left arm a large shield that was curved to cover his body. It was made of wood edged with metal, and the handgrip on the inside was protected on the outside by a metal boss. The outside surface of the shield was covered with leather and embellished with metal decorations—it would be soaked in water before battle to fend off flaming arrows and javelins. The weapons of the right hand were the javelin (*pilum*), of which each man had two, and the sword (*gladius*), a short, two-edged weapon (the shorter the sword, the quicker the draw). The tactic in battle was to first discharge the two javelins and then draw swords, close ranks, and charge, using the sword as a thrusting weapon. The target was the opposing soldier's lower abdomen or groin—the part of the body least well protected by armor.

SOLDIER LIFE

2 Timothy 2:3-4 Paul considered himself a 'soldier' for Christ and called others to join him in that battle, such as Timothy, reminding him that soldiers don't get tangled up and distracted by more mundane things, in order to please the commanding officer (Jesus).

1 Corinthians 9:7 In ancient Rome, soldiers paid their own expenses while in battle. But by NT times, the state paid them a wage. Paul uses that to show that soldiers in Christ's army certainly are worthy of blessings from him.

WORSHIP

SACRIFICE

Ephesians 5:2 Calls on OT language; what makes it sweet smelling to God is the status of the person making the sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Comparing the Law to old leaven and Christ to the Passover sacrifice, Paul tells them that the sacrifice has already been made and yet they still have old leaven in the house. They need to purge it and replace it with sincerity and truth.

PUBLIC ACCLAIM

The triumphal procession was a well-known event in Roman times. It was the greatest honor that could be bestowed on a conquering general. They marched around Rome, led by government officials such as senators and magistrates, followed by the spoils of the conquest and scenes that represented the triumph (painted scenes, statues, etc.). Priests then followed the group carrying censers of burning incense as well as sacrifices (animals) that would later be offered to thank the gods for this great triumph. Next came the triumphator, the person being honored by the procession, clothed in a purple toga with golden stars, carrying a scepter in one hand and a laurel branch in the other. A slave held a golden wreath above his head and continued to remind him that he was but a man. Finally, the last group was the soldiers who had fought for him, cheering for the commander.

Paul uses this image in **2 Corinthians 2:14-15** where Christ is the Triumphator and we are the priests carrying the sweet-smelling incense. This triumph is ongoing—we are “always” experiencing it through Christ. He uses it again in **Colossians 2:14-15**, where the record of our sin was nailed to the cross with him and thus overcome, allowing a triumphal march led by the leaders of the world as he triumphs through the cross.

SPORTS

CHARIOT RACING

Paul was very familiar with the sports events of his day. Some of his references are obvious but some nuanced, only recognizable by the language used. **Philippians 3:13-14** uses the language of a chariot race, with the driver not being distracted by other things around or behind him but focused on crossing the finish line, that he might in the end receive the summons (“high calling”) from God through Christ.

GAMES

Paul knew of the gladiator games held in many Roman cities. He speaks of fighting with wild beasts (**1 Corinthians 15:32**) as a justification for belief in the resurrection; he said he was rescued from the mouth of a lion (**2 Timothy 4:17**); and he counsels the Saints to stand together in the arena and defend each other (**Philippians 1:27**); and he alludes to being in the midst of such a battle (**2 Corinthians 4:8-9**).

ATHLETIC EVENTS

Finally, Paul used the great athletic events of his day as metaphors. He speaks many times of running a race (**Galatians 2:2**) and encourages others to stay in the race (**1 Corinthians 9:24-25**); he spoke of boxing in a real battle, not shadowboxing (“beatheth the air”; **1 Corinthians 9:26**); and he concludes his own mission introspectively mixing both of these and alluding to the laurel wreath given to the victors in such contests (**2 Timothy 4:6-8**).