



**Slippery Ground:  
Putting on the Gospel Shoes**

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**Pastor Robert Hamilton**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**

6926 Trail Boulevard, Naples, Florida 34108

(239) 597-3464

[www.covenantnaples.com](http://www.covenantnaples.com)

## Introduction:

Let's talk about shoes. Now that I have the ladies' attention, let's talk about athletic shoes and combat boots! Welcome, guys. It's good to have you back.

Athletic shoes are not necessarily made to look good. They are made to perform. In sports that are played on slippery ground a good shoe is critical. For instance, we all know how golf shoes work, right? The spikes under the sole bite into the grass beneath you when you swing resulting in a longer, more powerful shot. (I said longer, not straighter. Unfortunately, they don't make a shoe for that). Take baseball or football, for instance. Both sports rely on a shoe called the cleat. It fits and performs like a running shoe, but has a studded sole to grip the slippery grass field. Traction on the playing field gives you both stability and agility.

In sports, the right shoe can mean the difference between a win and a loss. In combat, however, the right shoe can mean the difference between life and death.

The ancient Romans developed many advancements in military technology and strategy; but a very simple one gave them a significant advantage on the battlefield. It was the *caliga* (or *caligae*). The *caliga* was the combat boot of the Roman centurion. It was a sandal-like boot made from leather that tied around the ankle. The sole was constructed from a combination of wood and leather. The most distinctive feature, however, of the *caliga* was its hobnailed, or studded sole, which provided traction and durability. It could also become a vicious weapon with which to stomp a downed opponent.

The Romans understood that hand-to-hand combat is fought toe-to-toe. If you cannot stand, you cannot fight. All the best Roman armor is of little use when your opponent knocks you down. When push came to shove, the Roman centurion could stand fast and firm while his opponent slipped on the grass, dirt, or rocks beneath him.

This is why the Apostle Paul instructs Christians to wear shoes for their soul when entering spiritual warfare. He most likely had in mind the Roman war boot, the *caliga*. In Ephesians

6:14-15 he exhorts us, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Just as a Roman soldier had combat boots that helped him stand firm in the day of battle, so also the Christian has a spiritual shoe to wear in battle—the gospel of peace. God is teaching something very urgent and profound:

***You must stand on the gospel before you can stand against the attacks of the Enemy!***

Shoes have a way of making us ready. When our family is in a rush to get somewhere I will urge my daughters on saying, “Hurry up, let’s go!” Sometimes one of them will stand there barefooted, looking at me and saying, “But I *am* ready!” Then I reply (very patiently of course), “No, you’re not. When you have your shoes on, then you’ll be ready. Put your shoes on and let’s go!” We are never ready to go unless we have our shoes on.

Earlier in this passage on spiritual warfare, the Apostle Paul urged us to “put on the *whole* armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11). Every piece is crucial. We need each and every resource God has supplied in order to face the hostility of the “spiritual forces of evil.” You do not want to go into combat unprepared! Yet some of us are in danger of doing just that. Like my daughters, we are standing before God barefooted saying, “Let’s go, I’m ready.” But we are not. When we put our shoes on—when the gospel is strapped on to our soul—then we are ready to face the evil day.

We are standing on slippery ground these days. It seems that most of our battles are fought on the “slippery slope” of moral relativism, materialism, sensuality, pluralism, and post-modernism. It hits us from every angle, trying to weaken our faith and stunt our growth in holiness. Our hearts, souls, and minds need traction. We need stability if we are to stand as faithful soldiers of Christ in a world of spiritual hostility. We need the gospel to prepare us for spiritual battle.

So how does the gospel prepare us to stand against the attacks of the Enemy? Notice that Paul here calls it “the gospel of

*peace.*" That is significant. The gospel, or good news, is a message of peace. It tells how God has made peace with man through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who believe the gospel are prepared for spiritual combat by the peace and strength they receive from Christ. Ironically, it is peace which prepares the Christian for battle.

You see, the gospel is not just for non-Christians. It is for Christians. We never leave the gospel behind. We may grow deeper in it, but we never outgrow it. As Martin Luther used to recommend, we should preach the gospel to ourselves everyday. It holds to truths of who we are in Christ. It holds out the promises of who God is for us as his children. We have to stand on the gospel before we are ready to stand against the devil.

When we stand on it in faith, the gospel of peace prepares us to fight spiritual battles in four ways.

**First, and foremost, the gospel silences the accusations of the Enemy.** Satan is referred to in scripture as *"the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night,"* (Revelation 12:10). Even the very name, *Satan*, is a Hebrew word that means 'accuser, adversary.'

*Central to Satan's mode of operation is to keep us from seeking God and serving God by accusing us of our sins, failures, and weaknesses.* In other words, he tries to discredit our right to fight against him. "Who are you," he says, "to align yourselves with God and his kingdom? I know who you are! I know what you have done! How can you call yourself a child of God? You are not worthy to stand in his ranks." So how do we stand on the gospel when Satan stands against us to accuse us?

The prophet Zechariah reveals Satan's ploy of accusation and offers God's remedy to it.

*Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before*

*him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.*

--Zechariah 3:1-5.

Zechariah, the Old Testament prophet, is given a vision of the priest Joshua, who represents every one of God's people, standing on trial before God. Joshua stands as a defendant, covered in his guilt and sin represented by his filthy clothes. Satan acts as a prosecutor, arguing that Joshua is not worthy to stand before the Lord or minister in his name. Then the Lord does something amazing. He rebukes Satan and declares Joshua righteous. He justifies him. To do this God forgives his sin and then gives him new, clean clothes that were not his own to wear. Now Joshua can serve God as if he had never sinned.

This is a perfect picture of how the gospel silences the accusations of the enemy. Jesus Christ lived a perfectly sinless and righteous life. He kept all of God's law. He also died in our place upon the Cross for our sins. The promise of the gospel, therefore, is that we can be declared righteous and find peace with God simply by believing in Christ's life and death. Romans 5:1 puts it this way, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* When God justifies us he forgives our sins, he credits the righteousness of Christ to us as if it were our own, and we are declared to be righteous before God and his Law. The result of all this is peace; peace with God and the peace of God is ours now and forever!

When Satan accuses us, he is right about one thing: we are not worthy in ourselves to be God's children or to claim eternal life. Even after we are saved, he will come and accuse us of our faults. But if we are standing on the gospel, then we will be able to rebuke him in the Lord's name and stand confident that we are servants of the Most High God and heirs of eternal life. By faith we can claim the promise contained in Romans 8:1: *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* If you are in Christ, then you are free from God's condemnation and

Satan's accusations! So you can with all confidence take your place on the battlefield among even the greatest of God's saints who have gone before us.

Do not try to do battle with Satan on the basis of your own righteousness or goodness. You don't have any! Whatever goodness or virtue there is in you was planted and cultivated by the Holy Spirit. Soon after the Edict of Worms, which condemned him as a heretic, Martin Luther was hidden away in the Wartburg Castle for protection. Luther later recounted that in that time he underwent one of the most intense and direct attacks of Satan himself. And yet this became one of the most productive times of his ministry. What was the key to his victory? Every time Satan would knock on the door, so to speak, he would tell Satan, "Martin Luther no longer lives here," and then he would ask Christ to open the door!

When Satan comes knocking, let Christ answer the door. Trust me, the last person Satan wants to deal with is Jesus Christ! Let's look at another way the gospel prepares us to stand against the Enemy.

**Second, the gospel calms the anxieties of our hearts.** If Satan cannot discredit our right to walk with God, he will try to break our will to serve God. He will employ any means necessary to keep you from pressing on. He will use intimidation, discouragement, anxiety, and depression. He will try to make you afraid. He will try to make you sad. He will try to redirect your focus to the future and all of its uncertainties. In other words, he will try to destroy our peace.

In warfare there are all kinds of weapons, but perhaps the most effective are psychological weapons that create a "shock and awe" effect. They overwhelm and intimidate the opponent into never even engaging in battle. Whether it's the primal screams and war paint of Barbarians or the inconceivable power of a nuclear bomb, some weapons are meant to get inside the head of the enemy and render him useless.

Satan has his own psychological weapons and he knows how to use them. He plays mind games with us. He tries to

intimidate us. He distracts our thoughts, taking our gaze off of God and placing it on ourselves or our circumstances. He turns mole hills into mountains until we feel like the spies in the Promised Land who felt like grasshoppers before the inhabitants of the Promised Land. However, for those of us who are wearing the gospel shoes, he cannot make us slip. Nor can he steal our peace or wither our resolve to fight for Christ, his truth, and his kingdom.

The gospel promises, and gives, peace. If we stand on it in faith, nothing can steal that peace. Jesus said to his disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"* (John 14:27). Jesus has not redeemed us to live in constant fear, anxiety, or angst. His salvation brings peace, and that peace makes us confident to face the onslaught of the Enemy.

So how do we keep this peace? First, we have to defend the battlefield of our minds. In Isaiah 26:7-8 the prophet declares, *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock."* Trust and discipline of mind—this is how we stay at peace. But more importantly, we must focus upon God. We must keep our minds fixed on Him—his truth, his power, his faithfulness, his justice, his love. When we do, Satan's taunts will fall on deaf ears.

Sometimes all Satan has to do is get us so worried, so mad, or so afraid, that we forget the promises of the gospel. I like the way C. S. Lewis explains this method of Satan in *The Screwtape Letters*. Screwtape is a fictitious mid-level demon who had been given the charge of training his nephew, Wormwood. He writes, *"It is funny how mortals picture us as putting things into their mind: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out."* The devil's best work will be done by keeping the truth of the gospel, the promises of Scripture, and the peace of God out of your mind. So you must always stand on the gospel. Without it you are not ready to stand against the Enemy.

Another way we must keep our peace is by prayer. The familiar and beloved words of Philippians 4:6-7 make it clear: *"Do*

*not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" It is interesting to note that the Greek word which is translated here as "guard" is a military term. It refers to a sentry who is posted to march around a fort or city. The peace of God, when we pray, takes up its post around our heart. It defends our heart and our mind from any deception, any worry, and any fear. When we are in constant prayer, Satan cannot get inside our heads or our hearts to spook us. We stand tall covered in the righteousness of Christ and filled with the power of God.

Fear is one of the great obstacles to being a part of truly life-changing service to Christ. If that obstacle can be removed by the peace Christ gives us, who knows what might happen. John Wesley, who once helped reshape the spiritual, moral, and religious landscape of our country during the First Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, once made this comment: *"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon earth."* Wow! Now that is confidence. Was he just beating his chest? I don't think so. He knew first hand the power that comes from being completely sold out to Christ and his kingdom. Moreover, he knew how to stand on the gospel when his faith was threatened by fear.

We have seen how the gospel silences the accusations and the intimidations of the Enemy. Now let's look at another crucial part of the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

**Third, the gospel promises the protection of God.** To face our spiritual conflict with confidence, we need to know that we will be safe. After all, our Enemy has real power. How can we know that we are spiritually safe against his assaults? The answer is that our God is more powerful and he has promised us his protection.

*First, he has promised to never leave us.* He has made a covenant with us declaring that *"You will be my people, and I will be your God"* (see Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 30:22). He has bound

himself to us forever. Jesus assured us, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). God did not redeem us at the high cost of His only Son, only to leave us to be devoured by the Evil One. We are of great value to him and the object of his strong love. We may be wounded in the fight, but His eye is on each one of us. He will not let the Enemy have victory over us! In the midst of spiritual warfare, we should never forget that God is always with us.

We also need to remember what Romans 8:38-39 says: *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus."* Predators in the wild, like lions for example, often look for stragglers or weak prey that they can separate from the pack. Then they attack with devastating consequences. Satan will do the same. He will try to separate you from the Lord and from the saints. But he cannot do it! Nothing has the power to separate you from the love and power of God. Why? Because you are such a great person? No. Because our God is full of love and mercy. In the gospel he has made you his child and servant.

*He has also promised to go into battle with us!* What God promised to Joshua long ago now applies to us because we are the people of God. *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:9). Jesus Christ is a battlefield commander. He does not remain safely behind the front lines in the war room or a bunker. He rides bravely and victoriously into battle before us. Like the Israelites, you can be sure that *"The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent"* (Exodus 14:14). The gospel gives us this courage.

*Finally, he has promised his power to us.* Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians, The Apostle Paul prayed a prayer that was meant to give peace and confidence to us. He asked that we might know, *"what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places"*

(Ephesians 1:19-20). Think of that! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is also at work in us who believe! No matter how weak you truly are, or how helpless you may feel, the gospel promises that the power of God will be at work in us! His power makes us ready for the fight.

**Finally, the gospel announces the victory of Christ and his kingdom.** Part of the Enemy's scheme is to make us think that he can actually win this thing. When things are not going well, he plants in us the nagging fear that we are on the losing side. Sometimes he does not need to tempt us. We ourselves can lose faith and wonder whether victory is sure. I have never fought in a war, but I can imagine that the impending doom of ultimate defeat must be extremely demoralizing. No one likes to fight or die in vain.

We do not have to wonder, though, about the outcome of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan, good and evil, the kingdom of light and kingdom of darkness. Jesus Christ made this emphatic declaration to the apostles, *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18).

When the Allied soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944, World War II ended in theory. D-Day was the beginning of the end. But there was still much fighting to do to bring Hitler's evil kingdom down. It was not until V-Day on May 8, 1945 that the war was finally over and the Axis enemies were fully defeated. For us as Christians today, we live between D-Day and V-Day.

The first coming of Christ established the kingdom of God, struck a fatal wound against Satan, and completely accomplished salvation. His second coming, however, will bring the full victory and the realization of all God's plans. It will bring into effect all the blessings of the gospel. It will remove all the curses of sin, death, and hell. Standing on the gospel, we can go into battle sure of one thing: victory is certain! Satan may win battles, but Christ will win the war!

I was not around to witness it firsthand, but I remember seeing pictures in history classes of the outright celebration that

flooded into the streets of New York and London at the news of Germany's surrender. There was joy, relief, and celebration. We cannot imagine what it will be like when the news comes that Satan has been defeated once and for all and that our fighting has ceased. The knowledge of the victory and celebration we will enjoy in the kingdom of God should cause us to fight on with courage, with hope, with joy, with peace.

In Ephesians, Paul gives us proof of this victory. Even though we struggle against forces of evil in the heavenly realms, Christ is *"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this present age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all"* (Ephesians 1:21-23). Christ's power and authority infinitely supersedes any that Satan and his minions may have. One day the war will be over; but for now we must fight on. There is real danger involved. So we must be diligent, disciplined, and steadfast. One day, however, the conflict will end. The Prince of Peace will rule over all and in all. So strap on the gospel. You are not fully armed for the fight without it.

We have seen how the gospel prepares us for the cosmic struggle we face. It silences the accusations of the Enemy, it calms the anxieties of our hearts, it promises the protection of God, and it announces the victory of Christ and his kingdom. So are you ready? There is a battle raging all around us. Don't take your shoes off until the war is over. Strap on the gospel and get into the fight. You have to stand on the gospel before you can stand against the Enemy!

