

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, amen.

If you've been on a plane any time in the last 25 years, you probably took a moment to leaf through the SkyMall catalog. If you haven't flown or don't remember, this was a catalogue full of innovative and weird products you don't really need. Items like a Yeti garden sculpture? How about a sleep mask that plugs into your iPod or a pen that takes pictures? Leafing through that catalog on a long flight, you might have thought you really did need that replica Harry Potter wand or that voice-recognition grocery list organizer. The last several times when I've flown, I've missed that Sky Mall catalog. It turns out SkyMall filed for bankruptcy. They're still around, but now their merchandise is offered, you guessed it, online at their website... Seems that now, in a world where gadgets are multiplying at a high rate of speed, people aren't waiting until they fly to do their shopping for battery-operated gadgetry. Gadgets are now no longer novel. In fact, they're almost totally passé. My email is full of offers for the latest and greatest gadgets most of which are totally useless... The best new gadgets seem to feature wearable tech. Smart watches, activity trackers that you wear on your wrist (like Fitbit) and cameras that you can wear on your helmet, are becoming more common, as are other devices that have the potential to make your life more interesting, if not better. When I was in seminary wireless ear buds that connected

to your cell phone first came out and I bought one. The first time I wore it I forgot to remove it as my class began. The professor actually stopped the lecture and asked me to remove the device from my ear as it was distracting her from her prepared lecture... While a lot of this gadgetry is interesting, most of it isn't essential, nor is it a cure-all for the inherent messiness of life. A smart watch might make it easier to answer your phone or check your calendar quickly, but it won't protect you from over-scheduling yourself. Your helmet camera may record cool videos of that epic ski run or downhill mountain bike ride, but it won't keep you from bashing into a tree. In fact, our reliance on tech sometimes gets us into trouble, like the people who hike with a wristwatch GPS instead of a map and then get hopelessly lost when they're out of satellite range.

What if there was wearable tech that never fails, is highly mobile, offers ironclad protection from danger and never runs out of power? The apostle Paul offers us a catalog snapshot of just such a product, and the cool thing is that it's free! It's a figurative "suit of armor" that's actually functional, unlike the 6-foot-tall Italian Armor Sculpture available in the SkyMall catalog.

The Greek word for the suit of armor Paul described in our text is "panoply." (SLIDE) Panoply was the light, maneuverable, state-of-the-art armor of the Roman legionnaires. Designed to be used within the virtually impenetrable Roman military formation known as the phalanx, (SLIDE) the panoply featured gadgets

with both offensive and defensive capabilities that shielded the empire from its outside threats better than any anti-virus software for your smartphone could ever do. This was wearable tech at its most basic and most effective. The front-line soldiers held their shields straight up while the second rank held their shields over their heads and covered both their own head and the head of the soldiers on the front line. The shields were designed to lock together so as to protect the entire formation.

**(SLIDE)** Paul saw the Roman panoply as a metaphor for the kind of tech that the church needed to wear in order to survive “the wiles of the devil” and stand against “the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (vv. 11-12). Unlike the Roman legions, whose panoply was designed to “struggle against enemies of blood and flesh,” the church's enemies are those powers that seem always to be poised to invade our lives, often through the very gadgets that we carry, wear and watch. If you glance at your cell phone, your tablet or your computer, and chances are you'll see plenty of images and invitations that are contrary to the will of God, even if you're not looking for them. The evil is so prevalent it's like the haze we've been breathing in from the wildfires out west for the past week or so... The more convenient our lives become, it seems, the more complacent we become in guarding our hearts and minds.

Paul's metaphor is an invitation for the church to band together to defeat the spiritual enemy that is always poised to strike at us. The Roman panoply was such that an individual soldier was protected only so long as he stayed in ranks with his mates, their shields locked together, facing the enemy. If an individual broke ranks, either to fight on his own or to run, he was vulnerable. The tech only works when it's used in community. We miss this reality, particularly because in our highly individualized, cell-phone-staring, button-pushing and thumb-twitching world, we don't realize that we're only as good as the community of people around us. Ultimately, it wasn't the armor that saved the Roman soldier in battle; it was his connection to the others.

Paul urges the church to suit up and check their connections to each other if they are to “withstand on that evil day” (v. 13). The apostle then goes on to describe each piece of wearable tech that, when used together, makes for a strong defense against the forces of evil. He begins with 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 (v. 14). The belt of truth enables the community to “put away falsehood” that “leaves no room for the devil” to operate (vv. 25-26). Our gadgets can be used for gossip, to separate, and to cancel those who may have different opinions or points of view, so

Paul begins with truth -- the wearable tech that is most protective of the cohesion of the community of faith.

The “breastplate of righteousness” and the “helmet of salvation” (vv. 14, 17) are echoes from Isaiah 59:17, where God himself puts on the armor to go out and repay his enemies for their evil. God's righteousness and salvation guard our hearts and heads in the knowledge that he has already defeated the enemy through the righteousness and salvation offered by Christ on the cross. Like a heart rate monitor app on your smart watch, the knowledge of what God has done for us in Christ, revealed in the “word of God,” helps us to gauge our spiritual health. The grace, mercy, and forgiveness offered to us helps us stay strong in the knowledge that we are eternally protected from the slings and arrows of the evil one, even when we fail or err.

Paul uses these images to encourage the church to put on “whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace” (v. 15). The best defense is a good offense, thus the church that's constantly moving outside its walls to preach the gospel of peace in the community through both words and actions will be most equipped to “stand firm” even while moving out into the neighborhood. The shield was a critical piece of the legionnaire panoply, since it provided the primary protection for both the individual and the entire group. For the church, faith acts as a kind of shield against “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (v. 16). A strong faith

is not just the product of individual devotion, it's the result of a church that rallies together in defense of the gospel and holds up those who are struggling.

At last, we come to the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17). One of the upsides of having all this wearable tech is that we have easy access to Scripture in our pockets and on our wrists. The writer of Hebrews tells us Scripture is a “sharp, two-edged sword” that cuts both ways -- it slices into the lies of the enemy and it can cut us to the heart when we are convicted of our sin. The more we engage in reading Scripture, the more we're able to see the enemy's catalog of temptations for doing evil for what they are: worthless junk that is harmful to both body and soul.

SkyMall may be on the way out, but gadgets are here to stay. New inventions are popping up all the time, especially with the advent of crowdsourcing that allows others to invest in a good idea. Paul reminds us, however, that it's the tried-and-true products that really stand the test of time, especially when it comes to guarding our lives in Christ. May each of us put on the whole armor of God so that together we can remain a Church both on the offense taking on the very gates of hell itself and ready to defend the Gospel. May we never tire of sticking together as we spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every corner of this territory. Amen.