

But 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 are hopelessly lost when the battery runs out.

But, 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 just such a product, and the cool thing is that it's free! It's a figurative "suit of armor" that's actually functional. The Greek word for it is "panoply" which was the light, maneuverable, state-of-the-art armored kit of the Roman legionnaires who were seen all over the Mediterranean world. Designed to be used within the virtually impenetrable Roman phalanx, the panoply featured gadgets with both offensive and defensive capabilities that shielded the empire from outside threats better than any anti-virus software for your smartphone ever could. This was wearable tech at its most basic and most effective.

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. 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. The more convenient our lives become, it seems, the more complacent we become in guarding our hearts and minds.

Paul's metaphor is thus 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. The armor was designed to protect only the front of the legionnaire and not his back, which ensured that his front was always toward 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, 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, and having done everything, to stand firm* (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 if we're not careful, 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 puts on armor and goes out to repay God's enemies for their evil deeds. God's righteousness and salvation guard our hearts and heads in the knowledge that God 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 more we exercise the grace offered to us, the more likely we are to stay strong in the knowledge that we are eternally protected from the slings and arrows of the evil one.

The Roman "caliga," or boot, was one of the key parts of the panoply. It enabled the legion to keep pace on the march with more precision than the step counter on your belt. Here Paul uses the image to encourage the church to put on *whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace* (v. 15). If the best defense is a good offense, then 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 phalanx. Shooting flaming arrows into the enemy's

ranks was a standard tactic in ancient warfare, since individual soldiers would have to drop their shields in order to put out the fire. The Romans devised the counter measure of soaking the leather-covered shields in water before battle in order to extinguish the fires before they got started. 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, but is the result of a church that rallies together in defense of the gospel and holds up those who are struggling.

Last, 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 that 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 (Hebrews 4:12). The more we engage in reading Scripture daily, the more we are 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.

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Paul's Product Proposal

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Ephesians 6:10-20

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. You remember: it's the kitschy magazine full of innovative and weird products you don't really need. But, 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. And who can live without a Yeti garden sculpture? Or a sleep mask that plugs into your iPod? Or a pen that takes pictures?

Alas, SkyMall is no more: the company filed for bankruptcy earlier this year. It seems that 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 gizmos. Gadgetry is now no longer novel. In fact, it's totally passé, except for a few of the top gadgets of 2014.

The best new gadgets of 2014 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 devices that have the potential to make your life more interesting, if not better.

The Ritot Projection Watch, for example, is a gadget that can display the time on your hand in beautiful digital colors because, you know, turning your wrist to look at a regular watch is, like, such a hassle.

There are Hush Smart Earplugs that will block out the sounds you don't want to hear, like your husband's snoring or your neighbor's yappy dog, but still allow you to hear sounds that you want to hear, like the ringing of your phone.

The ShotTracker device uses a wristband to track how well you're doing at shooting a basketball, because simply keeping score clearly isn't enough.