

THE CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

Ephesians 6:10-17

When we were saved, we declared war on Satan and the Christian conflict began. The Christian life is a continual conflict. The battle must be waged daily against the most relentless foes. In this warfare there is no discharge. In this conflict the demand is for devotion, discipline, courage, determination, vigilance and hope.

I. A Final Predication. Ephesians 6:10.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Thus far this epistle has revealed some interesting things about God's power. Already we have learned something of His power towards us, in bringing us into His family. Then, we studied the exhibition of His power in us, enabling us to do above all that we asked or thought. Here we learn of His power through us, enabling us to face the foe and win the victory over him.

1. The inevitability of struggle.

Paul says, finally, or in respect to the rest that I have told you, do not forget or be unmindful of the fact that the appropriation of these blessings will of itself involve conflict.

The Holy Spirit, the Author of the Scriptures, never recorded any needless counsel. The very fact that He, through the Apostle Paul, told the Ephesians to put on armor is proof that they should expect conflict.

2. The insufficiency of self.

The very fact that we are commanded to be strong in the Lord indicates that we are weak in ourselves and therefore insufficient of ourselves. Even after we have been saved for years we have no more power within ourselves to insure victory over our spiritual foes than we had on the first day after we were saved. The excellency of the power is not in us, but it is of God. Therefore, it is necessary that we, by fellowship and communion with Him, maintain contact with the source of our much-needed power.

The average Christian usually tries to forget his weakness. God wants us to remember it and to feel it deeply. The Christian should conquer his weakness and be set free from it. Christ teaches His servant to say, "I take pleasure in my infirmities; most gladly will I glory in my infirmities." The Christian thinks his weakness is his greatest hindrance in the service of God, but God tells us that it is the secret of success. It is our weakness heartily accepted and continually realized, that gives us our access to and claim on the strength of Him Who said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

3. The indispensability of strength.

Paul said, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "Be made powerful in the Lord." Let God make you powerful. You must have spiritual strength, and only the Lord can furnish it. We have no strength of our own. Without Him we cannot do anything. Therefore, for us to think that we can be sufficiently strong in ourselves to withstand the enemy is pure folly. This folly will end in failure sooner or later.

So Paul urges us to be strong in the Lord! He has a power that He wishes to exert through these lives of ours, but He can never permit its use until we admit our weakness. If we would be strong in the Lord, then we must take what He has already provided for us. We cannot make it; we can only take it. But, we can do that, and in so doing be assured of a provision that will protect us in combat.

There is no substitute for God's power. When we substitute we are like David putting on Saul's armor. David never could have killed Goliath while wearing Saul's armor. Nor will we be able to vanquish our spiritual foes with any substitutes for God's power.

If there was ever a time for believers to be strong in the Lord, it is now, when the forces of evil are combining against the followers of Christ as never before. Those who receive the power of His might possess something that will be equal to all that may come into their lives, whether it be sweet or bitter, pleasant or unpleasant, joyous or sorrowful. The power of Christ was sufficient for Paul when he was facing execution, for Polycarp in the flames, for Livingstone in Africa and for Brainerd in the rigors of the forests among the Indians. The source of our strength is the Lord. We must be strong in the Lord constantly in order to be prepared for Satan's assaults when they come.

II. A Full Protection. Ephesians 6:11.

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The word "armour" brings to mind the stories of the Crusaders going forth to face the perils of a long and dangerous journey through foreign lands. Before the brave knight set forth on a crusade he looked well to his armor to see that it was in order, for he depended on it for protection from his foes. Since this world in which God's people are journeying is such an unfriendly place, it is imperative that the Christian pilgrim be armored for protection against his foes.

1. The provider of the armor.

Since we have nothing with which to meet this terrible foe, God provides the armor for us. Forged in heaven, it is a spiritual armor for the Christian conflict. God knows exactly what every believer needs for protection from the diabolical strength and cunning of the hosts of darkness which lie in waiting to attack the follower of Christ.

2. The purpose of the armor.

The armor is to enable Christians to stand against the wiles of the devil. Satan has a variety of devices whereby he seeks to ensnare Christians. His first attack is in the realm of the attractive. Although his wiles are attractive, they are deceptive and treacherous. His wiles may look ever so attractive, but they sting and bite like a serpent in the end.

Our conflict is with the spiritual hosts of evil arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare. Satan, our adversary, is a great deceiver and an experienced campaigner. He knows exactly how to approach each Christian. If he cannot defeat us with his wiles, he resorts to the use of poisoned arrows, such as doubt, unbelief, suspicion, scandal and discouragement. They hurt long after they reach their mark. In referring to the prolonged struggle which often takes place when the adversary is desperate and must resort to last ditch tactics in order to gain the advantage, Paul spoke of wrestling.

We are living in evil days. There are constant exposures to dangers of all kinds. The militant position must be maintained throughout life. We may be weak, but we must stand. We may be weary, but we must stand. We may be fearful, but we must stand. We may be defeated in a single battle, but we must stand. We may see others fall about us, but we must stand. We may see others desert the cause, but we must stand.

"At the critical moment in the Battle of Waterloo when everything depended on the steadiness of the soldiery, courier after courier kept dashing into the presence of the Duke of Wellington, announcing that, unless the troops at an important point were immediately relieved or withdrawn, they must yield before the impetuous onsets

of the French. By all of these the Duke sent back the same spirit-stirring message, 'Stand firm!' 'But we shall perish!' remonstrated the officer. 'Stand firm!' again answered the iron-hearted chieftain. 'You'll find us there!' rejoined the officer, as he fiercely galloped away. The result proved the truth of his reply, for every man of that doomed brigade fell, bravely fighting at his post."

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus—
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you—
Ye dare not trust your own;
Put on the gospel armor,
And, watching unto pray'r,
Where duty calls, or danger,
Be never wanting there."

3. The parts of the armor.

(1) For the body. 6:14.

The parts of armor for the body are the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." The garments must be gathered and fastened securely about the loins lest they should cause the warrior to stumble or to become deflected in his attention to the business at hand.

The Christian warrior also dons the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was a most important part of the knight's armor, because it covered the heart. In that day men fought with sharp swords, long spears and iron darts. If the warrior's heart was not protected by a strong breastplate of steel, the weapons of the foe would speedily put an end to him. An instant's exposure of the heart meant death.

But far more essential than the breastplate of steel is that of righteousness prepared for the believer's protection. Mind you it is not his own righteousness. How helpless any believer would be if he tried to protect himself with self-righteousness! That would be as ineffectual as a breastplate of silk would be against the iron darts of the enemy. The righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer alone can avail as a breastplate of protection.

"Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne."

(2) For the feet. 6:15.

"And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Next to the protection for the heart, God mentions that which is needed for the feet. In every war the soldier must have his feet well shod, or else he will never be able to endure long marches over rough and stony ground. The believer who journeys through the wilderness of the world should not expect to walk upon smooth ground. It is a rough and hard road that he must travel, so his feet should be well shod for the journey. The gospel of Christ brings peace between God and man, and between men.

(3) For the hand. 6:16.

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." When the knight had donned his armor, he took up the shield without which he never went to battle. He held in front of him a great shield that protected all his body from the fiery darts which were flying thick and fast. These darts would likely penetrate the armor unless

the shield was used as additional protection. What is the believer's shield? It is faith—faith in God, faith in Christ, faith in the Holy Spirit, faith in the Word—just that simple childlike faith which does not leave any room for doubt or despair. This is a time when Satan is trying as never before to undermine the faith of God's children. The isms and cults and the insidious doctrines sugar-coated in deceptive guise are aimed to deceive true Christians. They will deceive some who are not grounded in the Word and strong in "the faith which was once delivered to the saints."

(4) For the head. 6:17a.

"And take the helmet of salvation." In order to engage the enemy one must see him, and in this way make intelligent contact with him. To do so means that there are times when the warrior's head must be exposed around the shield. Of course, that means a potential hit. So, there is protection for the head as well.

(5) For the mouth. 6:17b.

"And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." What a protection He has given us! It is not only for protection, but also a weapon for conquering. The believer is to wield "the sword of the Spirit" as he journeys through the world. "The sword of the Spirit" is intended to equip the Christian in his life of unceasing conflict. A pilot without his chart and compass, a scholar without his book, and a soldier without his sword are all alike ridiculous. But more ridiculous and absurd is it for one to think of being a Christian without knowledge of the Word of God, and some skill in the use of this unique weapon.

The conflict is real. The equipment is perfect. The fight has to be waged. Let us stand true and faithful. In order to do so, every Christian must hide the Word of the Lord in his heart that he might use it in the hour of temptation and thereby refrain from sinning against God.