

THE CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

Ephesians 6:10-17

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians during his imprisonment in Rome, while he was guarded constantly by a soldier. It is not surprising, therefore, that his letter compared the armor of a soldier with the spiritual characteristics which a Christian needs in order to cope with Satan and his forces. In this comparison Paul recorded the most detailed, striking and instructive passage on Christian warfare which is found in the Scriptures. It reveals a grim realism in the concepts of Paul regarding the relationship of the Christian to the world in which he lives.

The fundamental thing in life is a personal knowledge of Christ. This knowledge centers in an experience which the individual has when he receives Christ as his Saviour. From the beginning to the end the Christian life is a continual conflict, a battle for the right against the wrong. Just as soon as one is saved and becomes identified with Christ a Christian conflict begins and must be waged daily against the most relentless foes - the world, the flesh and Satan. As long as a Christian lives on earth and is engaged in the Christian conflict, from which there is no discharge, there will be a real need for devotion, discipline, courage, determination, ceaseless vigilance and undaunted hope.

I. The Need of the Armor. Ephesians 6:10-13

The very fact that the Holy Spirit, through Paul, told Christians to put on an armor is sufficient proof that they should expect a conflict. The fact that we are commanded to be strong in the Lord indicates that we are weak and insufficient of ourselves. Mere human strength will never be sufficient to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. Sufficient strength for victory over these relentless foes can come from God only. It is always wholesome when Christians realize and acknowledge their weakness. 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."

Paul said, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Let God make you powerful. If you would live in a manner as becomes the Christian, you must have spiritual strength and only the Lord can provide it. We do not have any strength of our own. Without Him we cannot do anything. For us to think that we are sufficiently strong in ourselves to resist Satan and his forces is sheer folly.

The Lord has power which He wants to exert through our lives, but He will never do so until we admit our weakness. There is no substitute for God's power.

Those who receive the power of His might 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. We must be strong in the Lord constantly in order to be prepared for the assaults of Satan when they come.

None of us can afford to underestimate or to minimize the power of Satan. The Word of God informs us that Satan is unscrupulous, deceitful, subtle, resourceful, determined, skillful and powerful. He attacks us at our weakest point, and the only way in which we can possibly overcome him is through the strength given to us by our Lord. Satan is an experienced strategist, but Christ is wiser and stronger than he, and can enable us to stand undaunted and undefeated. In the light of the evil forces that are arrayed against us today, we certainly need to heed Paul's admonition, "Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

"Wiles" implies deliberate schemes or planned attacks of the adversary, against which the children of God are to stand fast, with the help of their heavenly Father. The twisting and turning of the serpent is a striking symbol of the subtlety of Satan. Under Satan's influence, and arrayed against the Christian, are principalities and powers, the world rulers of darkness, and the hosts of wickedness. God alone provides sufficient power to enable the Christian to withstand the attacks of Satan through these various channels.

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 defective and treacherous. They will sting and bite like a serpent in the end. If Satan cannot defeat us by means of the attractive, he will resort to the use of poison arrows, such as doubt, unbelief, discouragement, suspicion and scandal. These arrows hurt long after they reach their mark. Because we are constantly exposed to these dangers, we must maintain the militant position. We may be weak, weary and fearful, 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."

This 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 a brave knight ever set forth on a crusade he looked well to his armor to see that it was in order. He depended on his armor for protection from the foes who sought to injure him.

Since this world through which God's people are journeying is such an unfriendly place, it is imperative that they be equipped with the proper armor for protection from their foes. Inasmuch as their foes are so numerous, subtle, cunning and powerful, Christians not only need a complete armor but also much strength, skill and courage to use it. Knowing the diabolical strength and cunning of the hosts who are waiting to assail the children of God, our heavenly Father has the exact armor which they need for their protection.

II. The Nature Of The Armor. Ephesians 6:14-20

These verses contain a clear description of the armor every Christian must wear if he is to wage a successful warfare against the foe. Observe that it is the same armor for everyone, without exception. This armor is ready for every Christian. He does not have to make it, to beg for it or to buy it, but simply to take it by a definite and purposeful act of faith and wear it. To refuse to wear it will spell defeat; whereas, to use every part of it will mean victory.

1. Parts of the armor are defensive.

(1) For the body. Verse 14.

a. The girdle of truth.

A girdle was a strong belt holding the ordinary Oriental attire in place. Without it the loose flowing garments became very cumbersome, flapping about the feet, and especially hindering the movements in a strong wind. It was necessary for the garments of the knight of old to be gathered and fastened securely about his loins lest they should cause him to stumble or to become deflected in his attention to the business at hand.

Thus a child of God should be encased in the truth and have his entire life regulated by it. All truth springs from our Lord just as light emanates from the sun. He is the center and the circumference, the sum and the substance of all truth.

b. The breastplate of righteousness.

In that day men fought with sharp swords, long spears and dangerous darts. Therefore, the breastplate of steel was a most important part of a warrior's armor. No soldier would either venture forth on a mission into enemy territory, or engage in a battle without its protective metal. Worn constantly during combat, the primary purpose of the breastplate was to give protection to the vital organs of the body -- the heart, lungs and liver.

Far more essential than the breastplate of steel is that of righteousness. There is only one real righteousness, namely, "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22). As the breastplate protects the heart from danger, so His righteousness, when it is imputed by Him and appropriated by Christians will protect them from the great deceiver. Whatever righteousness one may have, it has been imputed to him.

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

(2) For the feet. Verse 15.

Next to the protection for the heart and the other vital organs, God mentions that which is needed for the feet. If a soldier is to endure the long marches over rough ground, he must be well shod. If the believer in Christ is to journey over the rough roads through the wilderness of this world, his feet must be shod with the gospel of peace which Christ gives.

(3) For the hand. Verse 16.

When the knight donned his armor and started into the battle, he held in front of him a shield that protected his entire body from the fiery darts which were flying thick and fast.

If the child of God is to withstand the fiery darts of Satan, he must have as his shield a strong faith in God, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit and in the Word --- just that simple childlike faith which does not leave any room for doubt or despair. The shield of an unshakable faith in God and an absolute reliance upon His Word will enable you to win a marvelous victory.

(4) For the head. Verse 17a.

The helmet is for the head, which is the seat of intelligence. The assurance of salvation is a wonderful protection for the mind. Both the salvation and the assurance of it come from the Lord.

2. Part of the armor is offensive.

Both of these parts are for the mouth. They are:

(1) The sword of the Spirit. Verse 17b.

What a protection for us! It is not only a protection, however, but also a weapon for conquering. This mighty weapon, which is the Word of God, is to be used offensively in putting the enemy to flight. Time and again our Lord wielded this great weapon effectively, saying, "It is written, etc."

There is a grave danger that the Christian will be so occupied with his defensive armor that he will neglect to use this invaluable offensive weapon. When believed, obeyed and proclaimed, the Word of God is the most effective weapon against the hosts of darkness. Instead of merely talking about this sword, let us really wield it frequently and skillfully.

(2) The spear of prayer. Verses 18-20.

Prayer is vital to right living and Christian service. The hosts of wickedness are delighted when they can keep Christians from praying. Being utterly dependent on God for guidance and strength, each of us needs to pray for himself. If we would win our daily battles, we must keep in touch with Him Who is able to make us more than conquerors through earnest, believing and persevering prayer.