

ARMED WITH LIGHT!

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." Romans 13:12.

This subject brings to mind two newspaper items, entirely unrelated in time and place.

Item one came from Great Britain in World War II. It reported that the long and frequent blackouts in British cities, notably London, had caused the rats to multiply to the point where they were a serious menace. A special day for rat-killing had to be designated. Rodent pests had become a problem in the absence of light.

Item two came from our own country. It seems that the police chiefs of American cities having a population of 10,000 or more were polled to see what connection there might be between crime and inadequate street lighting. In some cases the chiefs reported that crime had dropped as much as ninety percent when blighted areas were properly lighted. The average estimate of crime reduction through improved lighting was forty-three percent.

There is danger in darkness; there is safety in light. That ancient message needs no changing. Upon the contrary, it has applications that range far and wide.

Say what we will, the Christianity of the New Testament offers scant comfort to those who dislike sharp contrasts. It talks about the two ways: one narrow, one broad. It describes the two foundations: one of sand, one of rock. It calls off the names of two classes: the children of God and the children of the devil. It speaks of two spheres of living: in the darkness and in the light.

In our text we have the contrast between "the works of darkness" and "the armor of light." We may sometimes get them mixed up in our living as Christians, but from God's point of view they are unmixed opposites, and one excludes the other. The phrase "works of darkness" speaks of all that realm of self-centeredness and evil that is outside the will and control of God.

On the other hand, the phrase "armor of light" stands for that full Christian discipleship in which the will of God and the Lordship of Christ are actually in command of our lives. Such a life is not necessarily the easiest. It is simply the safest and strongest.

Our concern now is to discover with Paul what is meant by putting on "the armor of light."

I. Making The Warfare Of Christ Our Own.

Paul and the early Christians lived in a day when the armed legions of the Roman Empire were everywhere. Perhaps that is one reason why the Apostle made frequent use of military illustrations and phrases to describe the strenuous side of Christian living. To the Ephesians he said, "Put on the whole armor of God." He exhorted Timothy to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." In his soldierly swan song he declared, "I have fought a good fight." In all of this Paul took the bloody business of war and transferred it to the realm of the spiritual.

Let us get one thing straight: nobody escapes fighting. Furthermore, one of the major tragedies of life is that throngs of us do our fighting in the wrong sphere and in the wrong way. How many of us are engaged today in a civil war within our own souls, fighting ourselves, exhausting ourselves, destroying ourselves! One man, in a Christian fellowship circle, confessed: "I am a battleground between two selves--one a retiring self, the other a domineering self." What he needed was to let a third and higher Self, Jesus Christ, take over and resolve the conflict by cancelling out both selves in the fullness of His Lordship.

There are others among us who are fighting against people. There's conflict with someone

in the family. Or there's a feud on with neighbors. Or there's a battle against someone at the office or place of business. There is no way of measuring how much emotion is wasted in hatreds, resentments and angry explosions by people who, instead of fighting on the spiritual front for Jesus Christ, are wearing themselves out in private battles for petty causes that center in themselves.

Here, then, is the beginning of what it means to wear "the armor of light": to make Christ's warfare our own.

II. Making The Way Of Christ Our Own.

Like most of the utterances of the Holy Scriptures, these sacred words are illuminated by their context. In verse thirteen Paul says, "Let us walk honestly," meaning "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly." He then tells us, negatively, what this appropriate way of living is. He assures us that it is not the way of "revelling and drunkenness." Obviously, then, it is the way of self-discipline and sobriety. Paul's description of Christ's way of light goes further: "not in debauchery and licentiousness." Obviously then, the way of Christ is that of purity and chastity.

Christians are to be decent and chaste for Christ's sake. Those who are not Christians should also be decent and chaste for the sake of health and happiness--both their own and other people's--since these social virtues are proven safeguards of community welfare.

Paul's description of the way of light goes on to embrace one more couplet: "not in quarreling and jealousy," or "not in strife and envying." Obviously, then, the Christian way is that of peaceableness and contentment.

The way of self-discipline and sobriety, the way of purity and chastity, and the way of peaceableness and contentment--that is Christ's way of light that we are to make our own.

III. Making The Weapons Of Christ Our Own.

It is a strange spectacle when the children of light wear the armor of darkness and fight with Satan's weapons. When the soldiers of Christ harbor the very spirit they are to fight, it is no wonder that their warfare does not have any conquests, and that they spend their strength in vain. It is tragic when we permit the indwelling things of darkness to infest and weaken our powers.

Let us now single out three weapons, namely, love, consistency and fellowship.

Take the first. If you are going to be armed with light, Paul insists that you must have the weapon of love. "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Romans 13:9). "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

Christ's soldiers are not armed as the world's warriors are. The world's captains are armed with shrewdness, with force, with cruelty and with revenge. Christ's soldiers are armed with love. The result is that often they appear to fail, to be defeated and humiliated, just as their Lord was on the cross. Yet, strangely, victory rises straight out of their seeming defeats.

Years ago, on our eastern seaboard, a lot of Delaware Indians were gathered by some half-intoxicated soldiers into a Moravian Church for a special meeting. The whole thing proved to be a dastardly trick by the soldiers. The doors of the church were locked and the church was set afire and burned. Other Indians of the tribe went on the warpath. Christianity had done this to their relatives and tribesmen, they thought,

so it was only natural for them to become furious. But the daughter of the chief, herself a Christian, went among them, sang hymns to them, prayed for them, taught forgiveness to them and won them to a saving knowledge of Christ. As a weapon, love is tremendously powerful.

"Let us walk honestly, as in the day." In other words, "Let us walk becomingly," or "Let us walk consistently." When the spirit of revival stirred a small group gathered for heart-searching, one man said, "I'm a counterfeit; I can give advice, but I don't live it." Many are like that. All must let God re-equip us for living in the light.

A third weapon is fellowship. While this word does not appear in connection with our text, its meaning certainly does. We must not overlook the force of the plurals in our lesson. It does not say, "Let me put on the armor of light," but it does say, "Let us put on the armor of light." "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness." "Let us put on the armor of light." "Let us walk honestly."

God would have us to see that the darkness of this world is organized. It is darkness in conspiracies and combinations and vile confederacies. Frankly, you and I cannot stand up to it alone. We need each other. The federation of the unholy needs to be met by the fellowship of the righteous.

Christians who are inclined to "go it alone" are not wise. We need the fortifying ministry that comes from common worship, common burden-bearing, common stewardship and common service. Have we that sense of responsibility for learning how to tell others about Christ, so that we are stimulating our fellow Christians and being stimulated by them to get out and share with those who are unsaved the glorious faith we profess? Our community of action along these lines is a powerful weapon. What no one of us can accomplish alone, numbers of us can do if we will pray and work together.

Note this wonderful expression: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." This exhortation of the Holy Spirit is full of significant meaning. Oh, for grace to learn how to do it and to be willing to do it! Wrap yourself up in Christ. He is everything you need. He has everything you can ever require. Submit every faculty, every capacity, every talent and every possession to Him. Submit all that you are and have to Him, and delight to own His superior right and royal claim to you. Yield yourself completely to Him and you will find that you will no longer be defeated, unholy, irritable or despondent, but that you will be cleansed, blessed, empowered and triumphant. Properly armed with light, we shall be able to win the victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. "Put on the armor of light" is an appropriate battle-cry for each and every Christian. Even though you are saved, you will never have the strength to perform your God-given duties, except as you receive it from the Lord. Go to Him for the power which you will need every day that you live on this earth. He will never fail you.