

The Good Fight

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THE Bible teaches that behind the evil of this world there is a malignant personality, the enemy of God and man. Satan is real. His reality requires that we be alert to what he is and to what he is doing. He is a formidable adversary, dedicated to the destruction of men's souls and the ruination of Christ's church. What a field day he is having at the present time! He is responsible for the sin and unbelief of modern society and is to be blamed for the divisions in church-life which disrupt fellowship and destroy the effectiveness of Christian testimony.

Martin Luther said: "A man, especially a Christian, must be a man of war". This world is a battlefield. Satan is here with his sinister ranks and his terrifying arsenals. Against him stand the forces of God, determined to repulse his attacks in the Lord's Name and under the banner of redeeming grace. It is a time of war. Our lives here, if lived to the glory of God, should be characterised by continual battling against the powers of evil.

In Ephesians 6, we are told to prepare for battle: "Take unto you the whole armour of God" (Eph 6:13). Paul lists the vital pieces of the Christian's armour. What are they?

The Girdle of Truth

The allusion is to the military belt which supports and keeps in place everything a soldier is wearing. Our belt is God's Truth, revealed in Scripture and received by faith. "The word is truth" (John 17:17). That Truth is a basic and essential piece of armour. It gives us inner strength, brings great confidence and stability, and fits us for action. In these days of confusion and uncertainty, how thankful we should be for an infallible and inerrant Bible! We need to

keep that blessed book close to us at all times. It is the secret of victory.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate was the coat of mail which covered a soldier's chest and was his body's main defence. What is our protection? Paul tells us it is the righteousness of God. Righteousness is a legal term and signifies the full answering of the Law's requirements. Righteousness is what sinners do not have. However, the good news of the Gospel is that God's eternal Son was willing to become the official Representative of His people and meet the Law's demands on their behalf. His every command He perfectly obeyed; its dreadful penalty He fully bore. The Bible speaks of this complete satisfaction rendered to the Law as the "the righteousness of God". When sinners place their trust in Christ alone for salvation, God credits that righteousness to them, and accounts it as theirs. "The righteousness of God... is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Romans 3:22).

What a thought this is! Believers are in possession of that righteousness which the Law requires. They are said to wear it, and as a breastplate, because it protects them from all the accusations of Satan. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Romans 8:33).

The Sandals of Preparedness

Roman soldiers wore sandals, the soles of which were studded with hobnails, for the protection of the feet and for firm footing. What does Paul mean by "having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"? It seems to be this: Christian soldiers, fortified by the "peace" of the "Gospel" (Romans 5:1), should be "prepared" for obedience,

hardship, trouble, suffering and the full onslaught of the enemy. In other words, the doctrines of this glorious gospel should stir and embolden us. Do they? Have they moved our hearts and made us willing for devoted service to the Lord Jesus Christ? The truths of God made such a mighty impact on Paul that he was “ready” for anything and everything. He was “ready” to preach, travel, suffer and, if need be, to die. That kind of devotion is essential if we are effectually to withstand Satan on the battlefield.

The Shield of Faith

The soldier’s shield was large and oblong, able to protect every part of the body. Our shield is faith. When we take our stand for Christ and His kingdom, doubts, evil thoughts and terrible suggestions come to us thick and fast. These are Satan’s “fiery darts”. There is only one way of extinguishing them and preventing their effect. Faith must be exercised, relying on the divine promises. It perceives the unseen Christ to be at hand, able and willing to help. It trusts entirely in Him. “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us”(Psalm 62:8).

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet was usually a leather cap, strengthened by metal plates to protect against the battle-axe. This vital piece of armour represents to us our salvation.

When tempted, doubt and despair sometimes make us feel like giving up the struggle, but if we have the assurance of present safety and future glory, we shall not shrink from the battle. We shall rise up contending against sin, and this triumphant spirit of New Testament Christianity makes us shout in the face of our foes that “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 8:37).

The Sword of the Spirit

The sword was short and two- edged. Its spiritual equivalent is “the word of God (which) is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). That Word, inspired and made effectual by the Holy Spirit, is the weapon for this fight. There is nothing like it! Once unsheathed and wielded, it proves itself mighty to repel every attack. Satan cannot stand against it. Remember our Saviour and how he answered Satan with “It is written...” (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). We too must use it in defence, when assailed by the same Tempter. But we must use it in attack too, proclaiming everywhere the free grace of God, for the saving of men’s souls and the utter overthrow of Satan’s kingdom. When the church learns again to use “the sword of the Spirit”, the Devil and his armies will flee from the field. May God hasten the day!