

“TAKE UNTO YOU THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD”

We are all acquainted with Paul’s exhortation,

“Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

There are several things suggested by this upon which it may be profitable to rest for a few moments. It is, of course, a figure, but none the less clear in its application—perhaps more clear than if the lesson had been expressed plainly, especially as Paul lets us into his meaning by speaking of the armour in detail. He speaks of loins girt about with truth, of a breast plated with righteousness, feet sandalled with the Gospel, also of a shield of faith, an helmet of salvation, and a sword of the Spirit.

We need not engage ourselves with these details. It might be interesting to follow the various analogies to these weapons in the accoutrement of the spiritual man. It is sufficient for the present purpose that we recognise the general meaning of the armed state used thus in figure. It means a fortified state of the mind, as to which there are two leading ideas to lay hold of, of a very vital bearing. This exhortation presupposes that we need to be armed. The experience of us all must convince us of the truth of this. The absence of mental armour means certain death in the battle we are fighting. It is a very real and earnest battle. It’s not a fancy or a talk. It is not a dream, but a life and death conflict with foes, whereof the end is fatally sure with those who do not overcome. Our foes are of different shapes and sizes, but they all work to the same tragic end, they all aim to edge us over the fearful precipice, at the bottom of which lie the splintered bones and bespattered blood of millions.

There is first the sentence of death in ourselves, which we bring into the world with us, and which is slowly but surely working out its appointed end with us every hour of the day. If this constitution bent is left to itself, it will as surely in the long run consign us to eternal oblivion as the boat floating down Niagara’s tide will go over the falls at last. If it is not fought it will infallibly prevail against us, and send us away. It is a dragon monster waiting with jaws outstretched ready to devour, and it will certainly have its prey if it is not conquered. There is a way of fighting it. It has a weak spot on the head, and a certain royal weapon can find this out. In Christ only can we overcome the death that has passed on all men by Adam’s disobedience; compliance with his directions only—submission to the Gospel alone—will give us the victory here.

But there are other foes more deadly. Such is the one called the old man. This covers our whole nature in its native propensities. Left to itself, this will draw us to death more certainly than the one which presents at the very start of the journey.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

This carnal mind will lead us to disobedience; and we know that the way of disobedience is the way of death. We all have this carnal mind at the bottom. We know what it is. It is the state of mind which the human faculties left to themselves produce.

In its purest state, we see it in the barbarian, who has been brought up without tutoring and without law, and who is like the beasts that perish. In a slightly diluted state, we see it in half civilised nations, and more or less, in men of all nations among whom a true civilisation does not exist anywhere. The natural mind is the fundamental bias even with men who have become subject to the law of God. Its affinities are a great trouble to such, as witness Paul’s lamentations of his wretchedness from this very cause, in Rom. 7. Paul laboured to keep it at bay (cp. 1Cor. 9:27) and laboured successfully, as we know from his last words, but men who are not engaged in this war, a war with themselves, bringing the natural mind into subjection

to the law of God—have no chance at all of victory. Instead of overcoming they will assuredly be overcome, and thrown into the ditch.

Then there are enemies in a more concrete form. There is an evil heart of unbelief which stupidly and insultingly insists upon seeing before believing, and is not quite sure then. This is a great enemy. Without faith it is impossible to please God. If a man will not honour God by taking Him at His attested Word, God has no pleasure in him, and He will cast him aside finally as of no use to Him. The pleasure of God is the ultimate standard of existence, a true doctrine but hard to be received in a generation which, above all things, has forgotten that man exists for God, and not God for man;

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour, and power, for Thou hast created all things and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.”

If God take no delight in a man, a man is undone; and God taketh no delight in men who know and recognise Him not.

“The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy,” “in such as keep His covenant and do His commands.”

Then there is the case of ignorance and the pleasantness of folly; a man who lays down his sword in their presence will be taken prisoner to his destruction. Then there is the love of the present world which is natural with all; the love of the praise of men; the love of money;

“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.”

All these and many other snares and temptations, such as plausible friends of carnal mind, lie in the way as so many robbers and beasts of prey to destroy the unwary. It is no very extravagant figure which speaks of the conflict with these as a battle. A battle sore and fierce it is; and the victory is not easily won, but victory is possible. It is a question of the right equipment, and the right use of the weapons. Without equipment, there is no chance at all. Equipment is the first essential. In this conflict, a man with a mind unfortified has no more chance than a man without armour on the field of battle.

In what does this mental fortifiedness consist? Dismissing all circumlocution, it is that state of clear certainty with regard to all the things of God which Paul expresses by the phrase—*“the full assurance of faith.”*

“This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.”

How true is this. Faith is strength in every matter with which man can have to do. Let a man but have faith in what he is doing, and he will work with a heartiness and an earnestness and a perseverance that will be entirely lacking from the efforts of a man who doubts. Whether it be the sinking of a mine, the working of a commercial concern, the floating of a ship, or the simple earning of wages, if a man's faith is shaken, his mind is in the state described by Solomon *“like a city broken down and without walls.”* His heart will gradually sink, his efforts will flag, and finally work will stop.

It is so in the Truth to which we are called by the gospel. Let a man have full assurance of faith—let him be quite certain that there is a God in heaven—the God revealed to Israel who has created and upholds all things in heaven and earth; let him be quite certain that Jesus, whom Pontius Pilate crucified, has risen from the dead and is now alive, as Paul affirmed; let him be quite certain that this Jesus is at God's right hand as a mediator between God and man to dispense the forgiveness of sins, and that he is coming anon to be the judge of the living and the dead, to give to every man according as his work shall be—a place in the kingdom of God with glory, honour and immortality, or a shameful rejection from the presence of outraged love to perish miserably in the judgments that will break up the present evil world—let a man be quite certain on all these matters and the many glorious details involved, and he will walk with a firm step through this pilgrimage and fight with a strong arm in the conflict which all have to wage. He will pursue a thorough and a steady and an

unflinching course, as Christ's servant, with all the heartiness and resolute enthusiasm of Paul, who said—

"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

He will be enabled to accept the consequences without wavering—yes, with glad fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. He will glory in his extrusion from a society that rejects Christ and in his ostracism in the midst of a world walking in the pride of life.

"By him (Christ), the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

"The love of Christ constraineth me because I thus judge that if Christ died for all, then all died (with him) that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him that died and rose again."

But let a man have doubt, it is evident he will be very weak-kneed on all these things. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" will sound plausible with him. He will hesitate about sacrifice of any kind. He will take zeal for Christ very mildly, and will have far more sympathy for the world and worldly men than for those who go in heartily for the service of Christ. He will be easily led by his own natural mind in all questions and bearings. He will, in fact, be an easy prey to the many adversaries at which we glanced at the beginning. Being unarmed, he is quickly made prisoner, and marched off to the miserable end that waits all the servants of the devil.

It is manifest therefore that an armed state of mind—a fortified state of mind—a state of confidence and assurance in the faith of Christ is the first qualification for a successful conflict with the foes we have to encounter in fighting our way to eternal life. This being so, it is easy to see the wisdom of the exhortation to "*put on*" this armour. A good deal is implied in this. It shows that much depends upon our own resolute effort. This, indeed, is manifest in all the scriptures, and shown to us by every day's experience. No greater harm has popular theology done than the spiritual lethargy it has brought upon the people by its doctrine that we have to do nothing. The apostolic writings are full of the opposite doctrine. They are full of robust and breezy exhortation to put on, to put off, to beware, to take heed, to endure, to weary not, to fight, to overcome, to grow. The only apparent exception is where Paul says, "*It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure;*" but it is a misunderstanding that makes this look like an exception. Paul states the fact as a reason why they should "*work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.*"

If the common construction of it were right, it would be a reason tending in the opposite direction; for if God be working in us in the direct sense understood by the popular sentiment, it would be a reason why we should be the less concerned to do the work ourselves. But Paul's aim was to encourage the brethren by the recollection of the fact that the whole work to which they were invited by the gospel, as the power of God, was of God's own appointment, and could not fail of its results if they faithfully did their part. It was not like the bootless labour of men who put forth their strength in matters of human devising, which could end only in vanity and vexation of spirit.

If, then, we are to put on the armour which is to enable us to withstand in the evil day, does it not amount to this, that we are to make it a matter of vigilant policy to follow those things that strengthen faith, and avoid those that have the tendency to weaken it. There cannot be a reasonable demur to this proposition. But there is a great deal of unreasonable demur, and it is because of this that we must be on our guard. A friend may be the worst foe we have, if he give us evil counsel on this head and there are such foes. It is for men in earnest to resist the devil, even if he come in the guise of a friend with spiritual professions. There are things that strengthen faith, and things which weaken it. Daily reading of the Scriptures strengthens faith; the reading of Scripturally-minded books strengthens faith; attendance at the meetings

strengthens faith; faith is also strengthened by works of goodness (i.e. circulating the testimony in some shape or form, comforting the afflicted, succouring the poor), and by prayer. The company of godly men strengthens faith. Meditation in solitude, with the mind well stored in these various ways, has the same effect.

Things that weaken faith are very ready to our hand. Our own inertness is a very fruitful seed-bed of faith-choking tares. Take the Bible in what some people call “moderation,” a dip in when you feel like it, and not at all if you are in no mood; read novels by the hour; leave books on the truth alone, as a kind of superfluous reading, for you who happen to “know the Truth,” and only fit for handing to the stranger; go to the meetings of the brethren only now and then. As for works of self denial, in the way of blessing uninteresting people at a sacrifice leave that to canting fanatics and morose enthusiasts, take a turn at the theatre instead and mix freely with the gay and intelligent world; receive and reciprocate and encourage the friendship of interesting people, without any reference to their attitude towards the Lord of the universe—in fact take and enjoy your liberty without stint, following habits of all pleasant kinds without reference to apostolic rules of judgment, do all those things and faith will die, and nothing will be left of the new man but his stark and staring skeleton. Following such a course is reversing the apostolic rule of conduct. It is putting off the whole armour of God that ye may certainly fall in that evil day. NO, dear brethren, as you value your acceptable standing with Christ in the day of his coming, shut your ears with invincible determination to all preaching of such a liberty. We have been called to liberty, but not such liberty as this, not a liberty to serve the flesh. If we are free men in our relation to men and systems, we are the Lord’s bondservants, to live for him and in obedience to him in the midst of a crooked, perverse, flesh-serving generation.

Listen only to the voice of Eternal Wisdom which says—“*Put on,*” array yourselves with, take pains to provide and assume the whole armour of God. Obeying this exhortation, you will stand strong for the battle. With the breastplate of righteous living, the shield of faith—fortified mind, the helmet of Yahweh’s apprehended salvation, and the Spirit sword fittingly wielded in the recollection and right application of Yahweh’s written Word of Truth, you will be enabled to vanquish every foe, and to cut your way through the environing crowds of rebeldom into the glorious and applauding presence of the King—that is, if you use your armour. This is the last of the many beautiful points of truth suggested by Paul’s armour-simile. It is not sufficient that we be armed. The armour is for use. Soldiership in Christ is not a passive attitude; defence is only one of its functions. Its principal part is the part of aggression, to fight, to make war. It is necessary that we have an enlightened eye on this as on all other points. Our case will be a failure if having equipped ourselves thoroughly in the heavenly armour, we stand supinely in the presence of the enemy, watching or parleying with him; still worse, making friends with him.

Our business is to quit ourselves like good soldiers of Christ Jesus, as Paul exhorts; to fight the good fight; to give the enemy no quarter. Now, what does all this mean, but a state of earnest activity in the application of all our spiritual qualifications, to the purpose for which they are designed? It indicates the opposite of an idle, listless, indifferent, passive course. It indicates a spiritual habit the very reverse of those people who take the truth of God very easily, following only that which they “like,” neglecting spiritual culture; praying not always, but never, and pouring cold water on all earnest endeavour, whether in reading, exhortation, or seed-sowing, as a matter of superfluity. It indicates a positive and aggressive mood in relation to everything that is obstructive of progress towards the Kingdom of God.

A man in such an attitude, a true soldier of Christ, is first very severe on his own natural man. He will say to himself frequently, as Jesus said to Peter,

“Get thee behind me, Satan; thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

He will obey Christ's commands,

"Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

Having thus made war upon and overcome himself, he will make war upon the cloud of Satanism environing him on every hand; a Satanism, in whatever form, to be easily identified by the peculiarity defined by Christ—savouring, sympathising, not the things that be of God but those that be of men. He will attack the inertia of his surroundings; he will trouble the stagnant waters about him somehow; he will set agoing something that will exercise men's minds in a spiritual direction; and he will make it a habit to do this, at all appropriate times while he lives.

He will never ask—"What is the use?" It is his business, as a soldier under commission, to maintain war in the enemy's country, whether he can perceive or not the bearing of his individual performance on the general plan of the campaign. In this way he will *"endure unto the end,"* without reference to the attitude of a living soul. If he finds others of like mind and action, he will thank God for such help on the dreary field of battle; if he find nothing but disaffection and obstruction, he will resign himself to the fact as part of the bitterness of the evil day which is to end in unspeakable victory and joy. For like reasons, he will fight against every foe of righteousness. He will not only contend earnestly for the faith, but, if possible, still more earnestly for the obedience thereof in the observance of all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.

He will not be pugnacious or rude. He will not and must not strive; on the contrary, he will be gentle unto all men; nevertheless, his deep seated enmity to all things opposed to God will glow like a fire under all the sweetnesses of an amiable deportment. His resolution will be indomitable, his principles invincible; his purpose unconquerable. Nothing will turn him aside from the only course that hath blessing in it for all the world.

Manifestly, such a state of warfare would be undesirable as a permanent condition of things. It is hard on human flesh and blood even for the brief spell of human probation, what would it be if a thing for ever? This cannot be. All things shall at last be subdued unto the Son. There will be an end to all conflict when his whole work upon earth is finished. Glorious victory and everlasting peace await the end of the matter. It is with an eye on this that the good soldier of Christ Jesus is able to endure, and to persevere in that *"patient continuance in well-doing"* which God will honour with eternal life. It is the faith of this that enables us to overcome the world. And what a faith, not only glorious in its offered reward, but assured and certain in its truth! It is not a matter of cunningly devised fables. It is authenticated and demonstrated in every way such a matter in our circumstances admits.

Surrender to it! Give yourselves up to it with whole heart and whole soul. What is there apart from it? Does not all the world find the truth of Solomon's declaration that human life at present is all *"Vanity and vexation of spirit"*? Does not the highest effort and the most splendid success end in the coffin? Can you keep this life by the most industrious endeavour to save it? Can you, by your utmost skill, eradicate the evil that tarnishes, degrades, and blights universal life? Vain is all human effort at deliverance. The ages roll, and man's voice is hushed, and the best achievements of his wisdom all tend to decay and oblivion. Even the memory of the pyramid builder and the glory of Solomon vanish from the earth; how much more our petty individualities and our insignificant affairs.

There is deliverance under one banner only. The Captain of Salvation has sent his recruiting officers abroad. He will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Aim for a place in the immortal ranks of his glorified friends in the day of the 144,000. Enrol yourselves for the glorious polity of the age to come; and having enrolled yourselves in so glorious a service; having put on the uniform and armed yourselves for the fight, do not reconsider your position at all. Be like the Romans who burned their boats. Make retreat

impossible. You have nothing to lose in reality; you have everything to gain. Hold fast your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2
Pages 35-41
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