

The Christian Armour

Any one who has given himself to the service of God, will, of necessity, be in conflict with numerous wily and powerful foes, at the head of which is satan the devil. It is vital therefore for every Christian to be protected to be able to fight on until the battle is over, by the grace of God. This was the kernel of St. Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Ephesus, in which he not only highlighted the nature of the spiritual warfare Christians have to contend with, but also exhorted them on how they would escape the snares of the devil and his agents.

Using the imagery of the armour of a typical Roman soldier, he stated thus: "Finally, my 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. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." -Ephesians 6:10-17.

As could be seen from the text under reference, St. Paul enumerated the different parts of the Christian armour, consisting of defensive and offensive implements. This is typical of every war situation, the soldier has to defend himself against the attack from the enemy and at the same time be able to go into the offensive in order to secure victory. However, Christians are not fighting a literal war, their battle is spiritual, as St. Paul stated: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) The spiritual nature of the warfare Christians are engaged in is amply illustrated by the case of David who as a young lad had to fight Goliath almost barehanded as he found it difficult to move with the heavy armour soldiers used in those days. God granted David victory as a result of his faith in Him so that all "shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S..." -1 Samuel 17:38, 39, 45-47.

The persecution of the people of God by the devil and his agents has become more intense in this age, called the last days, because Satan is full of wrath, knowing that having been driven down from heaven, he has but a short time to live. (Revelation 12:7-12) Because the devil will inspire people to be godless and evil, Daniel the prophet under the inspiration of God declared that in this time of the end, "the wicked shall do wickedly" (Daniel 12:12) and that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" – at the instance of the devil. (2 Timothy 3:12) Knowing this therefore, Christians must be properly equipped so as to "fight the good fight of faith." – Proverbs 24:5,6; 1 Timothy 6:12.

Just as all parts of a literal armour are necessary in warfare, so a Christian needs to be fortified with all that are needful for spiritual battle. In giving the parable of a master and his servant, Jesus Christ stated that we should strive to do "all that is required of us" and to remain humble about it. (Luke 17:7-10). See also Ecclesiastes 11:1, 2, 6; Matthew 3:15; Matthew 23: 23.

Knowledge of the truth

St. Paul exhorts Christians in the book of Ephesians chapter 6:14 to have their loins girt about with truth. The soldiers of old used the girdle, which went about the loins to secure the various pieces of armour and hold them tight to the body. Without such a device, the various items would not be in their proper places and the soldier would not be ready for the fight. By the same token is the truth the basis of Christian beliefs and practices. Jesus Christ told the Scribes and Pharisees in his days on earth, that they were worshipping God in vain in as much as they were teaching “for doctrines, the commandments of men”. – Matthew 15:7-9.

In view of the fact that the truth can only be obtained from Churches founded by God through the instrumentality of the saints. Jesus Christ stated “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” (Matthew 7:16-18) Writing on the benefits of studying the Word of God St. Paul said: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” – 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. See also Psalm 19:7-11.

It is the knowledge of the truth that gives one courage to fight on boldly in the raging battle against sin and deceit. (Proverbs 6:23; 28:1; Psalm 119:105) The Scripture says, “A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.” (Proverbs 24:5, 6) Moreover the Bible says: “When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things.” -Proverbs 2:10-12.

Righteousness

The next piece in the armour mentioned by St. Paul is the breastplate, which is used for covering the mid-section of the body, where the heart is located. A good heart condition is crucial to meeting God’s standard of righteousness. This is because one could make a pretence of being spiritually inclined whereas his mind is evil. Some people, out of self-will and pride, do only those things that suit their interests and desires or that feed their ego – and yet they claim to be in the way of God. That is personal righteousness, and, as Apostle Paul explained, there is a world of difference between personal righteousness and the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:1-3; see also Isaiah 55:6-9) The righteousness of God is based on the honest, heart-felt desire to do the will of God, while personal righteousness is based on mere pretence and self-will. It could therefore be understood why Jesus Christ stated that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a man, not what he eats. He further said: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” (Matthew 15:18-20) He also told the unbelieving Jews in those days: “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”. (Matthew 12:34) Also, when the truth resides in one’s heart it will be hard for the person to be deceived by false doctrines and godless philosophies. (Psalm 119:9-11) For these reasons the Bible exhorts us thus: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” – Proverbs 4:23.

Some people say there is no righteous person on earth. This is wrong. One who understands and does the will of God as clearly spelt out in the Holy Bible is righteous by the grace of God. (1 John 3:7) Such ones will be saved from several harmful acts which lead people to sickness and

untimely death; above all, they will be protected by God from the assaults of the devil. Apostle Peter declared: "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" – 1 Peter 3:10-13.

The people who are given to doing the righteousness of God are always respected and happier than others. Indeed, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people". (Proverbs 14:34. See also Exodus 19:4) It should be pointed out that it is when the worshipper continues to do what is right that the blessing of God will continue to be with him. The words of Azariah the prophet under the inspiration of God Almighty are relevant here: "The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."- 2 Chronicles 15:2

Readiness to spread the word

St. Paul goes on to enjoin us to have our feet shod or covered. The soldier needs to have his feet properly protected from injury by rough terrain. With such protection for the leg, the soldier is prepared to move without fear, to wherever he is called upon to serve. By advising us to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Apostle Paul meant that we should be ready to dispense the gospel whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. One should be able to confess what he knows, in that the person who is afraid or too shy to do so because he wants to please men or because of fear of losing one benefit or the other will lose his reward. Jesus Christ said: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the Holy angels." (Mark 8:38) As St. Paul says, it is with the mouth "confession is made unto salvation". (Romans 10:10) Furthermore St. Peter declared: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" – 1 Peter 3:15; see also Jude 3.

The work of inviting others to know the way of Truth is part of the duty of every Christian which he should be ready to do at all times. This calls for knowledge, faith and understanding. St. Paul charged Timothy thus: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2) Moreover it is written: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17; See also Psalm 68:11) In the text the spirit is Jesus Christ while the bride are the anointed Christians.

Faith and hope

St. Paul's treatise also requires Christians to have the shield of faith. Faith is strong and unwavering trust in God. In the words of Apostle Paul, "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him". –Hebrews 11:6.

The fact is that the devil is bent on discomfiting the people of God by subjecting them to harrowing conditions with the hope that they will thereby lose their confidence in Him. The troubles a Christian may encounter may be so intense that St. Peter called it a "fiery trial". (1 Peter 4:12) As the shield protects the soldier from attack, so faith enables him to resist or ward off the assaults of the devil. (James 4:7) St. Peter exhorted us thus: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." -1 Peter 5:8, 9.

The Holy Bible is replete with examples of people of God who were faced with various persecutions at the instance of the devil. These include Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brethren; the three faithful Jews – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who were thrown into the fiery furnace; Job who lost his children and property; Daniel who was cast into the lion's den; the early apostles who were mobbed, beaten, cast into prison, while some were even killed. (Genesis 39:7-20; Daniel 3:1-30; 6; Job 1:7-22; Acts 5:17-19, 40; 2 Corinthians 11:24-33; see also Hebrews 11:4-40) But God Almighty always helps His people to cope with the challenges and to gain victory in the end.

Our heavenly Father will always protect, strengthen and save those who have firm trust in Him. One who lacks faith cannot secure the protection required to overcome what St. Paul called the "fiery darts of the devil". "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." – 2 Chronicles 16:9; see also Nahum 1:7 and James 4:7.

The helmet is a defensive part of the armour. It covers the head. This represents the hope of the Christian in the salvation of God. Hope gives one encouragement and strength to carry on even in the face of odds. Without hope one is disillusioned and spiritless. Solomon, a prophet and king in Israel said: "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Proverbs 18:14) It is because of the importance of hope that St. Paul exhorted: "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." –Romans 8:24, 25.

The two-edged sword

The sword is an offensive instrument. St. Paul applies it to represent the word of God. The word of God is likened to a two-edged sword because it judges both the speaker and the listener. The learned apostle said: "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12,13) As David the prophet said, it is through the word of God that His worshippers are warned. (Psalm 19:11; see also 1 Corinthians 14:24) The word of God, the Truth, is made up of doctrines, judgments, instructions and divine promises. It exposes insincerity, unbelief, hypocrisy, and so on, among worshippers of God and non-believers and makes bare the deceit of false prophets.

What happened when St. Paul appeared before Governor Felix is illustrative of the power of the word of God to convict consciences. The record states: "And as he (Paul) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." – Acts 24:25; see also Acts 19:18-20; Acts 2:37; James 2:12, 13.

Those who follow the word of God until the end will get life as Jesus Christ himself stated: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth

shall make you free.”-

John 8:31,32; See also John 6:63.

Fighting until the end

It could be noted that all the defences in the soldier's armour are for the front part of the body. The back parts are not secured. Once engaged in the spiritual warfare, the Christian must continue to press on; there is no question of turning back, backsliding or of deserting until the war is-over. (See Philippians 3:14) We must continue until the end even if iniquities abound and the love of many do wax cold. (Matthew 24:12,13) Apostle Paul had this frame of mind hence he declared at the end of his mission: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” -2 Timothy 4:6-8