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FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art also called." – 1 Tim. 6:12.

If we are naturally combative, we may see, or think we see cause for a continual warfare from the cradle to the grave, and a little warping of sound judgment may give this disposition a seeming religious turn and deceive such a one into the idea that he is fighting the good fight above referred to, when in reality he is only cultivating a quarrelsome disposition, out of harmony with that spirit of meekness and temperance which is a most essential feature of the Christian character. Again, many of an opposite disposition are inclined to ignore the fact that the Christian life is to be a warfare, and to regard only those scriptures which counsel meekness, forbearance, patience, gentleness, etc.

Here are two extremes, both of which must be guarded against; and in order to help us to rightly judge and balance ourselves, [R1041 : page 4] the Apostle recommends us to mark, to observe closely, those who walk circumspectly, according to the rules laid down in the Scriptures, and counsels us to beware of the influence of those who do not so walk: "For," he says, "many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things," which they covenanted to sacrifice. – Phil. 3:17-19.

Let us then mark some worthy examples that we may see how they ran for the prize and notice if there is any indication that they ran successfully. First, we mark the perfect example of our Lord, our leader and forerunner, in whose footprints we are invited to follow. We notice that his course in the "narrow way" of sacrifice, began with an entire consecration of himself to the will of God. His consecration was made

with simplicity and sincerity, and included all that he had – "Lo I come to do thy will O God." (Heb. 10:7.)

He did not say, Father, I will give thee a tithe of my time, my service, and my means, and retain the remainder for myself and for the pursuit of my own ambitions and plans. He did not say, Father, I have chosen this or that special work, and I trust thy blessing will attend it. He did not say, As far as I understand thy will, Father, I am willing to do it – with the implication that if the Father should ever ask anything too severe, or seemingly unreasonable, he might change his mind. No, his consecration was simply to the doing of the Father's will, whatever that will might prove to be. And then he earnestly applied himself to the study of the Law and the Prophets, that he might know the will of God concerning him. When tempted to change his course he replied, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be"..."The cup which my Father hath given me to drink shall I not drink it?" (Matt. 26:54; John 18:11.) He laid aside his own will and carried out the will of God, though it cost him privation at every step and finally a death most painful and ignominious. From this course of sacrifice he never wavered even for a moment.

That was a grand character for our imitation. Yes, but, says one, Our Lord was perfect and therefore could do the Father's will perfectly. Very true; we are thankful and rejoice in this, for had he not been perfect he could never have redeemed us; yet we needed also just such an example; for however imperfectly we, like school children, may succeed in imitating the copy, we need to have a perfect copy.

But while Christ was much more to us than a perfect example for our imitation, which under our present infirmities we cannot fully duplicate, we have other examples furnished among brethren of similar infirmities with ourselves. Let us mark them, and see how they followed the Master. There was Peter with his quick impulsive nature, always loving, yet so vacillating – now defending his Master at his own peril, and again disclaiming and denying him; now boldly contending for the

faith, and again compromising with Jewish prejudices, calling forth and justly meriting Paul's faithful reproof. Yet rightly exercised by reproof and discipline, and endeavoring to rule himself, his Christian character ripened and beautified from year to year as evidenced by his grand and noble epistles to the church, written by inspiration and handed down from generation to generation for nineteen centuries; and he had many evident marks of the Lord's loving approval. Before he had time to express in words his regret of his denial of the Lord, he was assured of his acceptance with him and of the continued favor of feeding his sheep; for the Lord knew the sincerity of his love and that through weakness and fear he had sinned. Mark too, Peter's affection for his "beloved brother Paul" (2 Pet. 3:15,16) who had so plainly reproved and rebuked him; and for the Lord, who had said "Get thee behind me Satan (adversary): thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but of men. (Matt. 16:23.) Poor Peter; it was an up-hill road for him, but he seemed to consider and appreciate his own weakness and to put his shoulder to the wheel in a more determined effort to overcome the propensities of his old nature, and to cultivate the graces of the Christian character.

But did he finally overcome? and was he accepted as one of that glorious company which shall constitute the Bride of Christ? Yes truly; for the risen Lord himself declared that his name is written with the others of the twelve apostles in the very foundations of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God. (Rev. 21:14.) See what poor weak Peter gained by his meekness and patience under painful discipline.

Paul was a stronger character by nature. He had evidently made a life-business of ruling himself, though he was naturally positive and firm; and when the truth reached Paul he had a great advantage at once, both in his natural disposition, and in his early culture, so that he could walk more firmly and steadily; and using all his energy in this direction he furnishes a noble example for our imitation of steadfastness and

endurance, of untiring zeal and sincerest devotion. See and ponder well, 2 Cor. 11:23-33 and 12:10,15.

John was loving, gentle, and meek naturally and that very disposition would make it difficult for him to sever the many ties of human friendship which such dispositions always draw about them. Yet John was faithful to his Master regardless of the human ties. He was a patient faithful teacher of the doctrines of Christ, and willingly suffered banishment to the lonely isle of Patmos for his faithful witnessing to the truth.

And similar was the course of all the apostles: they were bold faithful advocates of the truth, and examples of its power to sanctify them wholly, as they gradually grew in grace submitting themselves to its transforming influence. They were men of similar and varied dispositions like ourselves. Mark those who so run and do likewise. Our Lord marked these, and kept a careful record of their course judging them by their motives and endeavors; and he shows us that their course thus judged, all their imperfections being covered by the imputed righteousness of their Leader, was acceptable to him. They left *all* and followed Christ. Their *all* was not so very much, not any more in many cases than we have to leave, but it was their all, and so was acceptable. Peter had left his fishing business, and his friends, to travel with the Master and learn and teach the truth; he had thus given up his own will and present interests to do the will of God. And when he said to the Lord "Lo we have left all and have followed thee," the Lord did not say his little all was not worth mentioning, but he recognized it and encouraged Peter to continue to sacrifice *all*, with the assurance that in due time he would be rewarded. (Mark 10:28-30.) And so shall we all be, if we faint not; for faithful is he that hath called us, who also will exalt us in due time.

As we thus mark the course of the faithful ones, we see that their warfare was one largely with themselves. It was their endeavor to keep their own human wills down while they carried out the divine will. And

even in the one case of our Lord, where the human will was perfect, it was a hard thing to do, as evidenced by his words, "Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done."

But there is another side of this warfare which we have not yet considered, and which we dare not overlook if we would be faithful overcomers. The truth has its enemies now, as well as in the days of the Apostles, and we are set for the defence of the truth; hence the forces against which we must contend are not only those within, but also those without. To be listless and indifferent under such circumstances as surround us, is certainly no evidence that we are fighting the good fight of faith.

To fight the good fight of faith, implies, first, that we have a faith to fight for. No man can fight this good fight therefore who has not come to some knowledge of the truth – a knowledge sufficient to awaken his sympathies and enlist his energies in its propagation and defence.

Now look at the warfare on this side and see how the faithful soldiers of the cross from the beginning of the age to the present time have contended for the faith delivered to the saints. Did they calmly and comfortably rest in luxurious ease, enjoy what they knew of the truth themselves, and say nothing about it where it would cause a ripple of opposition, and then flatter themselves with the idea that their lazy do-nothing tranquility was an evidence of their growth in grace? By no means. They endured hardness as good soldiers for the truth's sake. They proclaimed it boldly, and took the consequences of public scorn and contempt, the loss of earthly friends, the sacrifice of business interests and earthly prospects, together with stripes, imprisonments, and perils to life on every hand, and met violent deaths in many cases. They not only enjoyed the glorious prospect of future blessedness, but they became active to the extent of their ability in carrying out God's plan for securing that end. Had they done otherwise they would have

been proving themselves unworthy of the high honors to which they were called. And so it has been throughout the entire age, and is still.

When the great Mystery of Iniquity, or Papal system had reached the height of its power and the very depths of its corruption, and the eyes of a few faithful children of God were opened to see its [R1042 : page 4] true character, noble reformers stepped out and boldly declared their convictions in the face of most violent persecution. And many other noble souls encouraged by their example, braved the same dangers and endured great hardships while contending for the truth, and gave evidence of their zeal and consecration by their faithfulness even unto death by violent hands, and unto persecution and torture of the most revolting and fiendish character.

It is well that we should consider frequently such examples, that they may serve to spur our own zeal, and that we may the more lightly esteem the comparatively light afflictions which we are now called upon to endure, in our efforts to disseminate and defend the truth to-day. We have now no bloody persecutions, though it is still true that they who will live Godly shall suffer persecution. To live Godly however, implies earnestness and consequent activity in God's service.

Remember too, that the Apostle refers to these last days of the age as the most perilous times of all. Why? Because the errors and temptations of this day come in more subtle forms than heretofore. This is emphatically the age of reason; an age of advancement in almost every direction; many are running to and fro and knowledge is increasing on every hand. And yet, human conceit and presumption is running vastly ahead of knowledge; and reason, unguided by the Divine Revelation, is falling into many foolish and hurtful errors, which are passing current among those who profess to be the children of God, who are deceived by these errors and are falling away from the faith once delivered to the saints. And though the great Babylon system is crumbling into decay, multitudinous errors, far more injurious than the formalism and slumber of Babylon, are at work, to build upon its ruins

other systems of iniquity in which even the foundation principles of Christianity find no place whatever.

These errors must be met by the faithful [R1042 : page 5] few who are armed with the truth, – others cannot detect or defeat them. It is for these armed with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to show by its profound reasonings the difference between truth and error, and that God's plan in God's way is superior to all the plans and ways of human arrangement. To escape falling into these errors, and being deceived by their subtle sophistries, and by the professions of loyalty to God on the part of the deceived deceivers who advance them, the children of God must keep close to their Father's Word, and be filled with his spirit; and when they see the truth they must be bold and fearless in its defence regardless of all consequences.

This is fighting the good fight of faith whether you are severely wounded in the conflict or not. And those who, sacrificing home comforts, etc., to scatter the truth, which read and pondered over by those who receive it, gives light and scatters darkness, are just as surely fighting the good fight of faith as if by word of mouth they were arguing with those they meet. They do it thus, much more effectually often. And such shall just as surely receive their reward and lay hold on eternal life as will Peter and Paul and other faithful soldiers of the cross, – if they faint not.

This little army of faithful soldiers, all told, is but a handful, "a little flock;" but though in numbers they are so insignificant that the hosts of the opposers of the truth fear little from their efforts, the final victory shall be theirs; and God's power will be glorified and manifested in them proportionately more. Like Gideon's three hundred picked men who feared not to face the hosts of Midian because the Lord was with them, these have but to go forth likewise, strong in faith, sounding the trumpet of truth and breaking their earthen vessels (sacrificing their human nature) that the blessed light of God's spirit may shine out; and at the appointed hour the hosts of the enemy shall take the alarm and

flee. Systems of error new and old shall be turned to destruction, and, as in the case of the Midianites, each shall turn upon the other to accomplish the work of their destruction.

To have the privilege of fighting this good fight of faith and of being the Lord's chosen ones for the great work now to be done, God's children, like Gideon's army, must first be *proved* – tested. At first there was a host of thirty thousand with Gideon; and when all that were fearful were told to return to their homes, only ten thousand remained, and when God further tested these, only three hundred remained; a little insignificant company truly they must have appeared, not only to the Midianites, but also to themselves. Yet, God's power was made the more manifest by their smallness and weakness.

Just so it is now. No one is compelled or urged into this service. All who are fearful, whose faith in God's ability and intention to carry out his plan is not strong enough to make them bold and courageous, and in haste to go forth, anxious to sound the trumpet tones of truth, and willing to break their earthen vessels (to sacrifice themselves) in the service, have the privilege of retiring from the scene: but of course such shall have no part in the honors of the victory with the greater Captain than Gideon.

Previous to Paul's exhortation to the faithful few, to fight the good fight of faith, he gives the very wholesome advice that we lay entirely aside from us the weights of our former earthly cares etc., – pride, ambition, discontent, money-loving, etc. We cannot grasp or hold the treasures of this life, and at the same time run successfully for the heavenly prize – "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," and "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let us then take Paul's counsel – flee these earthly things, and following after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life as joint-heirs with Christ in the glory of victory shortly to be granted. If after we have consecrated our all to God, we turn to mind and seek earthly things, and glory in their possession, we are really

glorying in our shame; and the end of such glory if pursued to the end, is destruction. See that ye walk circumspectly, not minding earthly but heavenly things, and not yielding to the temptations of those who walk otherwise. Thus we also shall be setting an example to others worthy of their imitation.

