

"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 seemingly religious turn and deceive such a one into the idea that he is fighting the "good fight," when in reality he is only cultivating a quarrelsome disposition, out of harmony with the 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, 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 whether there is any indication that they ran successfully. First, we mark the perfect example of our Lord, our Leader and Forerunner, in whose footsteps 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, 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.

Our Lord's was a grand character for our imitation. "Yes," says one, "but 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*.

ST. PETER A NOBLE SOLDIER

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 St. Peter, with his quick, impulsive nature, always loving, yet 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 St. 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. [R5109 : page 305]

Before St. Peter had time to express in words his regret of his denial of the Lord, he was assured of forgiveness and of the continued favor of feeding our Lord's sheep; for the Lord knew the sincerity of his love and realized that through weakness and fear he had sinned. Mark, too, St. 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 offense unto Me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Matt. 16:23.) Poor St. Peter! It was an uphill 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 St. Peter gained by his meekness and patience under painful discipline!

OTHER VALIANT WARRIORS

St. Paul was a stronger character by nature. He had evidently made a life business of ruling himself, though he was naturally positive and firm. When the Truth reached him 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 for our imitation a noble example of steadfastness and endurance, of untiring zeal and sincerest devotion. See and ponder well, 2 Cor. 11:23-33; 12:10,15.

St. John was naturally loving, gentle and meek; 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 he 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.

Similar was the course of all the Apostles. They were bold, faithful advocates of the Truth, and examples of its power to sanctify 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. God 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 very much, not more, perhaps, than we have to leave; but it was their all, and so was acceptable.

St. 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 his present interests to do the will of God. When he said to the Lord, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee" (Mark 10:28), our Lord did not say that St. Peter's little all was not worth mentioning, but He recognized it and encouraged St. Peter to continue to sacrifice all, with the assurance that in due time he should be rewarded. (Mark 10:29,30.) 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. – I Thess. 5:24; I Pet. 5:6.

As we thus mark the course of the faithful ones, we see that their warfare was largely one *with themselves*. It was their endeavor to keep down their own human wills while they carried out the Divine will. Even in the 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 as I will, but *as Thou wilt*." – Matt. 26:39.

THE WARFARE IN PROGRESS FOR CENTURIES

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 *defense* 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 evidence that we are not fighting the good fight of faith.

To fight the good fight of faith implies, first, that we *have a faith for which to fight*. No man can fight this good fight 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 defense.

Now look at the warfare from this standpoint 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. (Jude 3.) Have

they calmly and comfortably rested in luxurious ease, enjoying what they knew of the Truth themselves, and saying nothing about it where it would cause a ripple of opposition, and then flattered themselves with the idea that their lazy, do-nothing tranquility was evidence of their growth in grace? By no means!

The saints have endured hardness as good soldiers for the Truth's sake. They have proclaimed it boldly and have taken 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 in many cases they have met violent deaths. They have not only enjoyed the glorious prospect of future blessedness, but have become active to the extent of their ability in carrying out God's Plan for securing that end. Had they done otherwise they would have proved themselves unworthy of the high honors to which they were called. So it has been throughout the entire Age, and continues 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 true character, noble reformers stepped out and boldly declared their convictions in the face of most violent persecution. Encouraged by their example, many other noble souls braved the same dangers and endured great hardships while contending for the Truth. Thus they 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.

THE DECISIVE BATTLE NOW AT HAND

It is well that we 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 today. We **[R5109 : page 306]** have now no bloody persecutions, though it is still true that

those who will live godly *shall* suffer persecution. (2 Tim. 3:12.) 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 subject.

On the other hand, human *conceit and presumption* are 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, but who are deceived by these errors and are falling away from "the faith once delivered to the saints." The great Babylonian system is crumbling into decay, but 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 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 to prove 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 defense, regardless of all consequences.

This is fighting the good fight of faith, whether you are severely wounded in the conflict or not. Those who, sacrificing home comforts, etc., scatter the Truth by the printed page, which, read and pondered by those receiving 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 whom they meet. Often they do it much more effectually. Such shall just as surely receive their reward and lay hold on eternal life as will St. Peter and St. Paul and other faithful soldiers of the cross – if they faint not.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BATTLE

This little army of faithful soldiers, all told, is but a handful, a Little Flock. 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 shall 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 their trumpets 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-two 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. – Judges 7:3,7,22.

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 battlefield. But, of course, such shall have no part in the honors of the victory with the greater Captain than Gideon.

THE CONTENDING FORCES

For whom do we fight – for God? for Christ? No, we answer. We *fight for ourselves*. A great mistake is made on this point by many who seem to imagine that fighting the good fight of faith is doing something *for God*, which deserves His thanks and reward. The Almighty God does not need that we should fight for *Him*. He is omnipotent, abundantly able to take care of Himself and His cause; He needs not our puny efforts. God is fighting for *us*, and assisting and encouraging us to fight the good fight of faith on *our own behalf*. It is well that this feature of the case be clearly discerned.

Against whom do we fight? We answer, our battle is not against our fellow-creatures, nor with carnal weapons; indeed, we can have large sympathy for even our most relentless foes, who, to the extent that modern civilization will permit, are ready and willing to "despitefully use and persecute" us, and to say all manner of evil against us falsely. (Matt. 5:11.) We can readily see that they are blinded in considerable measure, either by their own prejudice and passion, or by the great Adversary's delusive false doctrines and superstitions. Hence our warfare is not directed even against our enemies, and as we have opportunity we are to seek to do them good, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." – 2 Tim. 2:25.

Hence also, when dealing with these, so far from battling with them and resisting evil with evil, our Captain has commanded that we return good for evil, gentleness for rudeness, kindness for discourtesy; and that we seek to do good to those who speak evil of us and persecute us, that thus the eyes of their understanding may be opened, and that they may be able to discern that there is such a thing as the spirit of Love, generosity, kindness, whereas they supposed all to be actuated by the same malevolent spirit of selfishness which controls themselves.

Our fight is to be against Sin – the great taskmaster which captured our race in the person of Father Adam, and has held it as slaves from then till now – mankind paying regularly for six thousand years the terrible penalty of death, with all its concomitants of sickness, pain, sorrow and trouble. Yes; this is the enemy whom we are to fight.

Indirectly, Satan is our enemy, because he it was through whose influence Father Adam first became the slave of Sin; and Satan has continued to pursue the same course, and is even now endeavoring to bring us back under the dominion of Sin, and to hold us there. We are not to forget, however, that our battle is not directly with **[R5109 : page 307]** Satan, nor are we to bring against him "a railing accusation" (Jude 9); rather, we are to say, with Michael, "The Lord rebuke thee"; and we are to await the Lord's time and the Lord's way for rebuking Satan. Nevertheless, we are to resist him; that is, we are to resist his influence and deceptions and endeavors to mislead us into error and into sin.

The Lord instructs us that "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 [exalted positions]." (Eph. 6:12.) Satan, as the great master, or general of Sin, has largely to do with all the various influences with which we must battle. It is his cunning, his "wiles," that supervise the battle against us; and since he is a spirit being, and therefore much more intelligent than ourselves, the contest would be a very unequal one if we were without a much more powerful Spirit Leader. But we are not

thus left to battle alone against superior wisdom and cunning. Our Captain, the Lord Jesus, has conquered Sin and has been glorified, and He is on our part, so that we can confidently say, Greater is He that is on our part than all they that be against us – Satan and his cohorts of evil spirits, and his deluded earthly agents and servants. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" – Rom. 8:31.

St. John seems to sum up the agencies through which our great captor, Sin, seeks to hold us as his slaves, or, if we have gotten free, to regain his influence over us, as *three* – the world, the flesh, the Devil. We have seen the powerful influence of the Devil, as the great general of Sin. We next notice in what sense the *world* is our opponent, and in what sense we are to battle against it.

We have just seen that we do not battle with carnal weapons, nor do we in any sense of the word battle or contest with our fellow-creatures, seeing that they are blinded by the Adversary, and really little, if to any extent, accountable for their course. Our battle is not with these. It is with "the *spirit of the world*," its influence, that we are to do battle; it is to be fought against and resisted. The world's disposition, the mind of the world, the ambitions of the world, the motives which actuate the world, the pride of life and the deceitfulness of riches – these things, these wrong views of matters as seen from the worldly standpoint, we are to resist, to *fight* against – and it is a *daily* battle.

Finally, our battle is with the flesh – *our own* flesh. Ever since Sin captured our race, in the person of Father Adam, its slavery has been conducive to mental, moral and physical degradation. Its tendency is toward evil only, and that continually; and only as we get rid of the blinding influences, the perverted tastes, desires, ambitions, hopes and loves which sin cultivates – only in that proportion do we come to see matters in their true light, and to have even a faint glimpse of our degraded condition. But our great Captain, who is also the Chief Priest of our Profession, redeemed us from this slavery to Sin with His own precious blood. He had compassion upon us, and when we realized our

deplorable condition and accepted His aid, He set us free from the yoke of Sin's slavery.

But we still have the motions of sin in our bodies – the tendencies toward sin, which have become almost second nature to us, through the long period of nearly six thousand years of slavery. So while we are now free, and with the mind are serving the Law of Christ and are accepted into His army as soldiers of the cross, to battle on the side of righteousness and Truth and goodness and purity, we nevertheless find our new selves harassed by the old perverted tastes and inclinations of our own flesh, toward the service of the old taskmaster. Not the least of our fightings, therefore, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus is against these perverted tendencies of our flesh, and the battle with these is a daily battle. With the Apostle Paul, one of the great soldiers of our war, we should be able to say, "I keep my body [my flesh and its desires] under [in subjection to my new will, my new self] lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." – I Cor. 9:27.

We enlist under the banner of our Captain; that is, from the time that we make a full consecration to Him, to fight the good fight, and to lay down our lives in His service – from that moment He reckons our flesh as dead. Our minds are renewed – alive toward God with a newness of life; and hence those motions of sin, which we are seeking to bring into absolute subjection to the will of God in Christ, are not recognized by our Lord as the will or motions of the New Creature, enlisted in His service, but merely as a part of the general enemy, Sin, pursuing after and battling with us, which we are pledged to resist and to war against, and to overcome which our Lord promises grace and help in every time of need. – Heb. 4:16.

CONTINUAL VIGILANCE URGED

It is these great enemies in our own flesh which cause us the greatest difficulties. It is to these that Satan appeals; it is these which he seeks to encourage in their warfare against the new spirit of our minds; it is through these that the spirit of the world gains closest approach to

us, and seeks to capture us and lead us back as slaves of Sin. So to speak, the New Creature in Christ is beset, surrounded on every hand with enemies, seeking our disaster and re-enslavement.

We must battle – *battle for ourselves*, battle for our own liberty, battle for victory over our own weaknesses, battle against the spirit of the world, battle against delusions and snares of the Adversary by which he seeks to make the evil things appear good and the right to appear undesirable. No wonder, then, that the Christian soldier is urged to be continually watchful; no wonder that he is urged to "put on the whole armor of God"; no wonder that he is cautioned in regard to his various and wily foes, and *especially* against those of *his own flesh*.

Thanks be to God for the great Captain of our salvation! Thanks be to God for the great armory of His Word, from which we obtain the helmet of salvation, the intellectual knowledge to protect us from the delusions of our own perverted sense, from ignorance, and from the wiles of the Adversary! Thanks be to God also for the breastplate of righteousness, the merit of Christ and His great sacrifice, compensating for our imperfections, covering our vitals and securing thereby our life – eternal life!

Thanks be to God also for the shield of faith, of trust, of confidence in Him who has bought us, in realization that He who has begun the good work in us is both able and willing to complete it! Since God so loved us while we were yet the slaves of sin, and redeemed us from bondage with the precious blood of Christ, much more does He now love us, and much more is He prepared to aid us now that we have, by His grace, become free from Sin, and become the servants of righteousness! Thanks be to God also for the sandals, the *preparation* to endure hardness patiently, which the Truth gives, protecting us in the walks of life, and from the sharp animosities of the world! Thanks be to God also for the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of His Truth, as a defense by which we can resist the Adversary and come off conquerors, through Him who loved us and bought us! **[R5109 : page 308]**

Previous to St. 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 and such-like things. 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." – Matt. 6:24; James 1:8.

Let us then take St. 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 back 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. Then we also shall be setting an example for others, worthy of their imitation.

"O watch and pray! for thou hast foes to fight –
Foes which alone thou canst not overcome;
Watching and prayer will keep thine armor bright;
Soon will thy toils be o'er, thy victory won.
O watch and pray! the Lord is at the door,
O watch and keep thy garments spotless, pure!"

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