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The Christian and his armor

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~ THESIS ~

The Christian and His Armor.

Setting forth the facts that life is a warfare;
that the Christian is a soldier; and that his armor
is God-given and complete.

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1890.

The Christian and His Armor.

In the early history of the world a great battle was fought the result of which vitally interested and affected all peoples in all times. The narrative recording this event is so short and simple that it is with difficulty one comprehends its stupendous consequences.

The Creator had of all created representatives of Himself in His own image fully equipped, a perfect spiritual nature possible of assault only on a spiritual basis. Means of resistance were provided but the subtlest and most evil of powers seized the favorable opportunity to assault the weaker one at the weakest point. The battle was soon over and evil triumphant. Humanity must henceforth exist humbled, spiritually dead, under life crushing tribute. Yet there was unceasing enmity, constant conflict and struggle to regain liberty. The nature of the conflict then as now was subjective — the struggle of man's innermost nature to be free.

There have been giants in all the days, giants of soul who have not hesitated to enter the arena of uneven contest, who have not faltered in hope of ultimate victory. But Christ, the second Adam, the mightiest champion of all ages challenged to battle all the hosts of evil. Nothing is so well known as the history of the contest and its marvelous results. Hope has revived and unnumbered hosts have entered the conflict since and trusting in Christ as Captain have battled victoriously to the end.

But for all enlisting in this salvation host over which Christ is Captain, all who assume the name and character of their leader there is a constant and perilous warfare. The discussion will be as to the nature of, and the preparation for this warfare.

Life and death were set the one over against the other even in the beginning. We know but little of the nature of either. If we hold the belief in a God, in whom and by whom all things subsist, we may predicate that those

things, or beings, and only those which are necessary to the harmony and perfection of God's eternal purpose can hope to attain life. Those things or beings not necessary to such purpose must perish. In the wisdom of God it has seemed best for those beings which He created in His own image that they pass through a time of probation, a time of purification that as gold is tried by furnace heat character might be tried and perfected.

That after terrible strife glorious victory should come. The same wisdom that makes it possible for such probation to end in life through righteousness and truth makes it also possible for it to end in death through sin and disease.

The same possibilities are open to every individual. The nature of the warfare is the same for all. Paul well describes it. He would teach us that man's subjective or inward being longs for and delights in God and His requirements, but these longings and desires are in constant conflict with the requirements of a lower passionate nature, the tendency of which is to take captive into

death. The Christian's most constant, persistent and tireless foe is self. His first duty is to resist all evil subjective influence. He must resist plethoric desire. He must set himself sternly against all temptations to evil. One sin unrepented, nursed and cherished will as truly lead to captivity and as a whole life steeped in iniquity. Every sin repented leaves a scar which mars the beauty and perfection of the Christy character. For any resistance we can make alone we may truly ask, "Whom can he save?"* or cry with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"† But even the insidious approach of the enemy which every individual finds lurking and watchful within his most secret counsels, his most sacred thought, may be successfully resisted, he being incased in the proper armor.

The Christian, besides his defensive attitude in relation to sin which enters in and finds lodgment in his own camp must be aggressive in relation to self. He must steadily maintain, develop and establish those elements in himself which

* Luke 18. 26. † Rom. 7. 24.

constitute a perfect Christian character. All Christians are Christ-like; pure in thought, word and deed; loving, helpful, sympathetic; haters of sin; champions of right. Against evil thoughts he must oppose pure thoughts; against falsehood, truth; against wrong, right; against all inclinations to evil, mightily longings for good. He must develop those God-like aspirations, which are part of his inheritance, by putting them into diligent practice. He must establish those eternal principles to which he has fallen heir by every reinforcement of thought and action which he can command. The things he must do, not now, today, this year, simply but all the days and years till life shall end. This more than Herculean work he may not hope to accomplish assisted by any power save that of Christ alone.

In the world's battle field, in the struggle for existence, it is marvelous how the weak ones, and we are all weak, constantly seek for an ideal leader upon whom to lean, in whom we may trust. Though the ideal we set up be shattered we quickly

try another. Until Christ came this longing for an ideal was never satisfied though very often expressed and perhaps never better than by Plato when he compares the just man to the true winner who runs faithfully to the end and is crowned. "This then must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty and sickness, or any other seeming misfortune, all things will in the end work together for good to him in life or death. He who endures to the end of every action and occasion of his entire life, has a good report and carries off the prize which men bestow.*"

But even since Christ is with us too many of us too often fail to make Him our ideal and the Captain of our salvation. In the late Rebellion after Abraham Lincoln was shot and lay in the White House dead, the mourning in every loyal home in the North and the the grief of every Union soldier saddened the whole conquering nation and many, very many, in their despair, forgot that Mr. Lincoln was not the first officer in command but only the second, and

* Republic, Book X., § 613.

having faithfully guided his hosts to victory was gloriously promoted. But the people had come to know him as a true man and their hope rested in him, and though he had been before his death the ideal of millions after his death his virtues were more largely magnified and scarce any limit was placed on what might have been accomplished had he lived. They should have remembered that Christ was the source of his power and was still available to them.

It is the Christian's high privilege to be a tower of strength for the weak, that as he has been lifted up by Christ his Christy life may draw others to loving, willing obedience to his Christ's commands. He enlists to fight the foe not only for himself, in himself, but for all others. He may cheer the faint, teach the sorrowing to rejoice, give strength to the weak, encourage the faltering, inspire the faint hearted, take light to those in darkness, and dispense hope to those in despair. The whole world belongs to the Christian soldier and he may command unlimited resources to crush

the rebellion of the devil and his usurpation of God's kingdom here on earth. He fights for his inheritance and the inheritance of his brethren. As the son of God he is vitally interested in every battle, every defeat, every victory, every conquest. His constant prayer is that soon God's kingdom may come to be on earth as it is in heaven. As the conflict thickens and the battle grows fiercer he sees the results must be so far-reaching and everlasting that every stroke has for him and all the universe stupendous and everlasting interest. His soul trembles, his spirit faints and if he but loses one piece of his armor the result is disastrous.

The Christian and his armor are inseparable and he can never become too familiar with its use and power. Paul describes the Christian's armor in about these words:

"From this time forth be a dynamic force in Jehovah and in the might of his strength. Put on every part of the armor of God that you may have the power to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood

but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spirits of iniquity found even in heavenly places. On account of which take every part of the armor of God that you may be able to stand opposed in the day of evil and having worked your way through to stand. Stand therefore having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all or over all taking the shield of faith by means of which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God: with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit and unto this watching with all readiness and steadfastness and petitioning concerning all points.*

We find then that our first piece of armor is truth. But what is truth? Not only did Pilate ask this question but every individual of the race since Adam has asked it. No man save

* Eph. 6:10f.

Christ alone is able to define it and never in so many words did He define it. He lived it and called Himself and His life its definition. His coming into the world was to witness to truth, to make possible truth in the lives of all men. But what is truth? The Apostle John says, "The law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."^{*} Would ~~he~~ we believe that truth in its fulness had not existed in the world until the coming of the perfect man in Christ Jesus? I think so. Again we are taught that the dark death truth, or Christy things, come from concealment, and darkness, and the devil is the light in order that his deeds may be shown forth and the fact revealed that they are wrought in and through God.[†] Having been adopted into God's kingdom of light he worships in spirit and in truth and by truth is made free from the slavery which he has escaped, the slavery of sin. What is truth? The manifestation of God in the world Christ Jesus or Christ Jesus himself. How are we to use this piece of man?

^{*} John 1. 17. [†] John 3. 21.

God the Father is to send us a Comforter which is the Spirit of truth or Christ's own Spirit, for He is truth and we are to trust its guidance in all matters and so come to perfect knowledge of Christ, His mission to us, our relation to Him and to all others.*

Guided thus with a Christy spirit and presence inasmuch that no blackness or corruption of concealment and falsehood may come near us we are ready to put on our breastplate which is righteousness.

What is righteousness? A righteous person is one who observes the right, (ἡ δίκη), the laws of God and man. Righteousness is the condition acceptable to God; the possession of integrity or moral soundness, virtuous purity of life, uprightness, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting. To be righteous absolutely one should be just as he ought to be in the sight of God and man. Jesus Christ was righteous. Do you say it is possible for not others to attain it? "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." †

* John 14.17. † Math. 5.6.

Why did not Paul have us put on this breast-plate first rather than gird ourselves with truth? Because having become enamored of Christ and begun to love Him and to wish above all things to be in and near Him always a great mountain of difficulty appears and we cry with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But in our despair we come to the feast of Paul and reading his Epistle to the Romans learn that these laws against sin, which in our sinful state we may not hope to fulfil have reached the extent of their authority over us; our slavery to them is over if we will but have faith in Christ who died to fulfil the law and accepting Him we may of His righteousness be justified. Possessing this faith in Christ, which to us as to Abraham, is reckoned for righteousness we may do right in the sight of God and so doing we are begotten of God and become His children here and now. We are brethren of Christ, becoming more and more like Him so that the aged Apostle in his

ecstasy cries out, "We know little of what in the future we shall be but this is enough that we be like Christ for we shall see Him in His glorious perfection and majesty."

Paul knew well that this is a time when the soldier can not remain in camp, and that he may march quickly, he gives to his feet the swift motive of telling others "What a dear Savior he has found." The "Gospel of peace," the glad message that Christ came to save men from sin and make eternal peace for His believing brethren who through the ages past had waged unending war against Satan and his angels.

Isaiah in vision saw this time as he murmured "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." * It is the great commission which Christ gave to His disciples and gave to all His faithful followers, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." † What is this wonderful Gospel? Simply that Christ died for you and me, that we might live and

* Isa. 52. 7. † Mark 16. 15.

dwell forever with Him. Christ died to free you and me from the bondage of sin and to make us absolutely free so that aspirations God-ward and heavenward may have full course and we may become more and more God-like each moment of our eternal existence. It is absolutely impossible for one to have this conception of Christ's Gospel in his conscience and not desire to proclaim it.

We are now getting pretty well equipped for the fight. But to still further protect and make powerful we must have over these the "Shield of faith", such sturdy belief in our God as no tempest of attack shall make falter. What a mighty shield! Faith even so small as a mustard seed shall remove mountains, cure the sick, make the blind to see, raise the dead. Faith! The word might well have been coined for Christ's special use so marvelously did He develop and inspire it. All Christians inspire faith and inspire it in others in proportion as they have it

in themselves. We ought to cry daily, "Lord increase our faith". Power keeps very near faith. The Spirit of Christ is largely measured by faith. Our righteousness is a constantly varying force and quantity because our faith in God varies as his temperature. We live by faith and we may live on the mountain top, face to face with God or down in the valley in the mists. We fight by faith and conquer by faith. We run the race of life by faith and having finished its course we may with Paul die in the faith.

By faith we may put on the helmet of salvation which is the establishment of character in truth and righteousness. Having faith as the foundation we add moral vigor and courage; moral wisdom; self control; perseverance; Godlikeness; brotherly love; and last of all love and so build a finished and perfect character. Salvation is moral health in place of immoral disease; righteousness rather than sin; soundness rather than cor-

ruption. I know not why Paul made salvation his helmsk unless he would have the soldier fully assured of his personal relation to God, that he has been saved through the blood of the Lamb. The testimony to this fact must needs be the strongest possible therefore God's own Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed saved. This knowledge makes the foundation for hope of salvation rest on bed rock. The Christian soldier may be defeated, tortured by doubts and fears, almost overwhelmed by his sense of responsibility but let his spirit commune with God's Spirit and he rests upon the solid Rock of eternal safety.

The soldier is now fully armed with all necessary protective armor but he must act on the offensive as well. He must stand; but stand after accomplishing all things, having conquered all foes, he goes forth therefore with the "sword of the Spirit, the Word of God". The soldier must take captive

for Christ. To do this he must make good use of his ready knowledge of the word of God, piercing and wounding and bringing to the feet of Jesus. The soldier is vitally interested in the subjugation of all peoples for the kingdom which is his kingdom and the kingdom of his Lord. His most valiant service then, should be conquest. He is a poor soldier who simply stands all his life barely maintaining his ground and may receive the reward of the steward who hid his Lord's money. He must, as Dr. Lyman Abbott says, be intimate with God and intimate with men and use his best powers to make them acquainted each with the other.* This sword of the Spirit is to be a constant source of comfort and strength to the soldier himself. God's promises will cheer him and make glad his heart and keep from despair. He will come to know God more and more in truth. He will learn of his own life now and in the future more deeply and by all these things

* Dr. Lyman Abbott, Speech before the students of the School of Theology, May 28, 1890.

be brought into greater loving trustfulness and holy confidence in his Father which is in heaven.

And now the soldier with sword in hand may consider himself fully equipped but one thing, the most important of all, is lacking. This must be used at all times with every piece of armour. Prayer, all prayer and supplication at all seasons to the Spirit - this with his armour forms his full equipment. He may go forth armed to victory. I am glad we are not required to do battle without first supplicating the Spirit. Since the Spirit abides with the Christian soldier how easy it is to converse with him in all places and at all times. No matter too weighty for his counsel or too trifling for his consideration. No secret he may not know and assist in keeping. No experience or duty, so high or low, so grand or humble, so joyous or sad which he may not share.

O glorious privilege, divine provision!
 The soldier knowing that he is in an innumerable company, in each one of whom he is to have a personal interest, never ceases to petition for their eternal welfare and Christian progress. He is sad over all defeats, joyous over every victory; interested in every triumph until with all the glorious army of saints he marches jubilantly along the golden streets of the city of our God, singing, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!"*

* Rev. H. S.