

CHRISTIAN WARFARE¹

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We love to hear the story of David and Goliath, over and over, how he slew that giant with his well-aimed pebble (and the giant's own sword, of course).

What was it that motivated young David to do this great deed? (The New English Bible says that young David had "bright eyes," clear vision, 1 Sam. 16:12.)

It's clear: David's motive was not a desire to marry the king's daughter Michal, nor any reward King Saul could give him. He was thinking only of the honor of the Lord: "Who is this pagan Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" He told Goliath, "I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, . . . whom thou hast defied. . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:26; 45, 46).

DEFENDING GOD

Can you conceive of the possibility that God may need someone to defend Him? That He could use a human being for that purpose?

Goliath was an arrogant, blaspheming Philistine giant who not only defied the armies of Israel but also for weeks publicly defied and blasphemed "the God of the whole earth." Israel and its army were not the primary issue; Goliath was challenging God's existence and His authority to choose and to bless a nation through whom must come the

Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Will God suffer this insult in silence, slinking away as it were, leaving Goliath to win the day?

God cannot strike Goliath with a lightning thunderbolt because He does not want to force a subservient worship based on fear. Goliath may himself be a big bully, but God cannot win the day by being a Bigger Bully. He can roar from heaven with a loud voice and frighten Goliath and the Philistines, but again that is not His way of doing things. Actually, as in the days of Job, God needs a human being to defend Him, because the battle is not "with sword and spear" (1 Sam. 17:45). Someone must speak up to maintain God's honor.

Enter into the arena the stripling, David, clad only in his shepherd's garb and armed only with a slingshot and a few pebbles. David was not principally a partisan contestant for national greatness; he had an understanding of God's character of love and of the sacrifice of Christ for the world. He spoke publicly in defense of the plan of salvation itself. To demonstrate for all time to come how God works in cooperation with man, He blessed David's skillful aim of a pebble from his sling shot, which caught the giant between his eyes, blinded and stunned him. Picture this lad jumping on the giant's prostrate belly, wresting from its scabbard his huge sword to use it on him before the giant recovers. A teenager has learned to appreciate the character of God, to trust Him, willing to face eternal death for His honor.

Can you conceive of 144,000 giant "Goliaths" blaspheming God in these last days? And 144,000

¹ Ephesians 6:12-13. 619, 618

“Davids” challenging and conquering them? Get in training today.

WHAT MOTIVATION DO WE HAVE?

Why do we serve the Lord, keep holy His true Sabbath, pay our tithe to the church, do missionary work, obey Titus 2:12 NIV by saying “No!” to ungodliness and worldly lusts? Is it that we are scared to give in to these lusts? For example, why do we say a decisive “No!” to the temptation to watch porno? Is it fear?

Or has the Lord delivered us from this Old Covenant motivation of self-seeking? Are we now thinking of the honor of Jesus Himself? (It’s so painful to Him, to be ashamed of us!)

The New Covenant motivation takes us to the cross of Jesus where we see for ourselves “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of the love of Christ (*agape*), “which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19).

What joy, to forget self and serve the Lord motivated by His love!

SINFUL DESIRES

Someone writes he is a 4th generation church member. Has worked hard for the Lord, baptized 20 people when he was only 25 years old. Paid tithe, gave second tithe, got up at 4 a.m. to study and pray, been fasting and praying for 10 years he says, every week. Tried to do everything just right, but still plagued by sinful desires.

Sin still inside of me, he says. He help me! What can be said to help him:

“Are you asking the Lord to do something He refuses to do? For example, He has never intended

to “take our sinful desires away.” There is no such promise in the Bible, even though some people claim that He has taken away their appetite for liquor or for cigarettes.² The Bible teaches that we will have our sinful nature right on until we are glorified when Jesus returns—but . . . He will give us grace to say “No!” to those sinful desires. For example, here is Titus 2:11: “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age . . .” (NIV). The “worldly passions” will still tempt the true child of God; but he will “deny” them (KJV). If you get to the place where you are not tempted, you are a blob of putty; you become like a piano with all the strings loosened so there is no music. What makes the music in the piano is the constant tension the strings are under. I think you may be bringing unnecessary discouragement on yourself by praying a vain prayer.

No, God has never promised to excuse you from having to fight the battle; He has promised to give you victory in the battle. God didn’t promise to deliver David from having to fight Goliath; He gave him success in the fight. That is how you develop character.

² “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Otherwise, you could never be happy in heaven, for everyone who gets there will have fought this exact same battle. (In fact, you can never be happy in this life either unless you fight your battles and overcome. The joy is in the victory, not in sidestepping the battle).

There are two Bible texts that appear on the surface to be self-contradictory. One is what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light,” versus the other one, the rather stern command of our beloved apostle Paul when he says, “Fight the good fight of faith” in 1 Timothy 6:12.

Jesus and Paul are not at odds, surely; can we conclude therefore that this “good fight” is what Jesus means when He says that His yoke is “easy”?

The Lord’s use of His word “easy” needs to be understood and appreciated. The word is not to be denied or disparaged; Jesus said it, He means it. He was wise when He said it, for Satan is constantly trying to convince us that becoming a true Christian is something only a few specially “strong” people can manage to do.

The truth is that there is not one “strong” person in this world; the greatest heroes in the Bible were weak—King David for instance fell flat before a woman’s pornographic temptation; Peter folded ignominiously under a mild temptation from a mere girl and denied Jesus cravenly.

Jesus is rightly seeking to encourage ordinary people like you and me to believe that it is possible to follow Him and enjoy companionship with Him—

in fellowship of spirit. We understand that Marines who fight together in hard battles become life-long buddies.

Eternal happiness in the kingdom of God will be this never-to-be-forgotten fellowship with the Son of God in fighting battles of faith. You two (Jesus and you) will always have a nodding wink between you that nobody else in the universe will fathom. That’s what that “white stone” will commemorate that He gives you in the judgment day that has within it a “new name written which no one knows except him that receives it.” You keep the secret with Jesus forever (Rev. 2:17). Imagine the whole universe wanting to pry into what you and Jesus keep private between you! And this, all because you made the choice to believe and appreciate what is in our chapter 13—the privilege of wearing “the whole armor of God” in the battles we face.

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13).

The King James Version renders it “take unto you,” but the New King James Version correctly gives the idea that the armor is something you “take up.” It’s waiting for you to take it “up.” It’s lying in your pathway where you can’t miss it. It’s like the Roman soldier’s armor that has been lying by his side all night while he has been snatching a little needed rest, but in the morning that’s his first job—to “take it up” and put it on.

Your first job each new morning is to “take up” this blessed “armor.” The Roman soldier may at night dream the most delightful dreams of holidays and

pleasure, but the morning light reminds him that he must be ready for the stern battle again today. Paul is very likely writing these words while he is looking out the window watching Roman soldiers on duty. Their job is not only to “stand,” but to “withstand,” for their very standing attracts the arrows of the enemy to try to force them to fall. So girding on the armor physically includes girding on the determination of soul to win this new battle today.

And the war is being so fiercely fought that if the soldier doesn't make any progress forward that he can see today, if he simply “stands” where he is, that will be a victory! Sometimes standing still is progress. The commander will commend his soldier for simply “having done all” that it was possible to do. Think of our heavenly Commander commending us likewise!

In our spiritual struggle, we are sharing the brunt of the attacks together with our Commander, Jesus; our battlefield is “heavenly places,” realms where spiritual battles are being fought. No one else, even in our personal family or among our classmates at school, or our fellow workers in the factory or the office, may have an inkling of what struggles we are going through. Never mind, the Commander knows; He has that glint in His eye. He sees you, He understands.

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14).

The Roman soldier first ties on his leather belt or the equivalent of our bullet-proof vest. There is a covering for his vital organs that must be defended

against a sword. Even if he loses a limb he can survive; but he must not lose a heart or other organ.

Truth is a precious entity that doesn't come lightly to anyone. Even little children fight this battle of truth; they are constantly tempted to tell or act lies. It requires as much of their moral fortitude to tell the truth in a playground squabble as for a CEO to tell it in a financial court of law. Blessed is the child who can come to the age of accountability before God with a keenly developed love of truth.

Yes! For example, the child can understand and believe the simple prophecies of Daniel and can reason out with firm conviction who the “little horn” is of chapter 8 and can make his decision that in the final crisis of earth's history he will be true to the Lord God of heaven and to His holy law and His holy Sabbath day. If children can be “girded with truth,” can't all of us also?

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). One of the grandest titles of the Lord Jehovah is, “Lord God of truth” (Ps. 31:5). Jesus said furthermore that He is personally “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). No one can deny truth in any particular and still be loyal to Jesus!

But truth always involves bearing a cross; that's why Jesus said that He is “the truth,” because truth always involves the crucifixion of self.

As Paul was watching the Roman soldiers, he thought of “righteousness” as being our “breastplate.” The word righteousness does not have a clear connotation for many people, for it sounds “theological.” It means simply right

judgment, the confession of truth, the choice to be loyal to the basic principle of being straight and upright—all of which requires self-sacrifice, or its profession is null and void. Paul encourages us to “stand therefore” defending what is right and letting ourselves be defended by it.

“And having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:15-17).

When Jesus commanded us to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), He meant that we must wear spiritual “shoes.” The “shoes” are what make it possible for us to “go.”

In the expression “the preparation of the gospel of peace,” the word “preparation” implies clearing a highway for the king to come, taking away hindrances or obstacles (Matt. 3:3, for example, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” repair the road, the king is coming). Paul’s idea is to have good shoes put on properly so there is no obstacle to hinder your mission. And the Good News of “peace” will open doors that are presently closed by prejudice.

Jesus knew that we would meet with opposition and suspicion.

As we go to proclaim the last message of salvation, we must let the people know that we are desirous of their best good. Here is where the message of health reform and medical ministry fit in with the proclamation of the gospel. It literally

“prepares” the way. The idea of “a preparation of peace” is appropriate.

As Paul studied the armor of the Roman soldier going into battle, he judged the shield to be the indispensable article. Fighting was dangerous business because the enemy shot arrows tipped with fire and poison. The shield must be deftly maneuvered. How does Paul see “faith” as analogous in spiritual warfare to what a shield does in physical combat?

It’s nice phraseology, but what does he mean?

The shield is grasped by one arm while the other arm grasps the sword. The two are complementary—one is defensive in battle, the other is on the offensive.

When we are proclaiming truth there is a kind of spiritual adrenalin that nerves us, but when the truth is attacked and we are on the defensive, we are especially tried in faith. Are we sure we are right in our understanding of truth?

New Testament definitions of faith are closely linked with the demonstration of the love of Christ at His cross; faith is a heart-response to that love. But faith also bears within itself the confidence that the cross, despised as it is now, is truth that will triumph. If you are a soldier in a Roman battle, the confidence that your cause will triumph will strengthen your arm which bears your shield. It will be more adept at protecting you from these “fiery darts.” Confidence and trust are also elements of Bible faith. To “believe in Jesus” is also to believe in the triumph of His cause.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all saints—” (Eph. 6:18).

The idea is a full-hearted devotion that appears on the surface to be extremism to people whose devotion is only lukewarm.

It is illustrated in Paul’s life himself who said: “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). But Paul is not some person unusually created, different from us; he many times confesses himself a sinner by nature just like all of us. What then has made him like he is, totally dedicated to Christ?

The answer: he has seen something we have not seen so clearly. And he has spent his energies writing this letter to the Ephesians to tell us what he sees—how Christ expended Himself in redeeming us.

His equation is simplicity itself: “the love of Christ compels us [constrains, KJV], because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died: and that He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). What Paul is saying is that we will find it impossible to go on living for self if we appreciate what it cost the Savior to save us.

THE 144,000

As time goes on, more and more people will sense the motivation of that constraint until a corporate body of saints, 144,000 in mystic number, will “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:4). Christ will see His character mirrored in them; they

will be to Him what a loving bride is to a husband she respects. The “marriage of the Lamb” will have come; then all we individuals will come as guests to the Wedding, while the church as a corporate body will be the Bride. That group will be the “all saints” that Paul speaks of here.

You have your part with them as you are “watchful ... with all perseverance and supplication” for others.

THE GRANDEST ROMANCE OF ALL TIME

A wedding means that now the bridegroom and bride will begin sharing life together. This explains how the coming time of trouble will be the “honeymoon” for Christ and His bride. They will get to know each other intimately as they share the excitement of that time. And if there is to be any pain and sorrow endured by God’s people in the time of trouble, you can be sure that Christ will suffer it as much as they.

He is not the one who brings on the time of trouble; He will not cause it in any way. He would love to return the second time in perfectly peaceful circumstances; the time of trouble was never His idea. It is Satan’s idea of a farewell party for the saints of God. It will be brought on entirely by the machinations of the wicked who let their hatred of God erupt into a final frenzy of rebellion. Christ will meet this head on as “Michael,” the Son of God to be sure but also the Son of man “not ashamed” to call us “brethren.”³ He is a partaker of our “flesh and blood,” the new Head of the human race, 100% human as well as 100% divine. Single-handedly He

³ Hebrews 2:14-18.

takes on the combined enmity of hell and of the apostate human race in the final defense of His people.

This standing up of “Michael” is the most solemn, awe-inspiring act humans have ever had a chance to see. All the Star Wars and Superman epics of fiction will be eclipsed by the grandeur of His final warfare when He sallies forth:

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁴

This is the theme of the Song of Solomon; faintly it hints of the unprecedented wonder of a people on earth becoming the bride of that Rider on the white horse. John’s poetry may imply that those “armies . . . in heaven” who follow Him are collectively that same bride, for he uses identical language to describe their outstanding qualification: they are

⁴ Revelation 19:11-15.

“clothed in fine linen, white and clean,” and the bride herself is also “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”⁵

Christ and His bride together face the challenge of the time of trouble, when His enemies “make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” It will be a thrilling encounter.

Why should any of us who are “with Him be afraid? It’s what we were made for, as when a bride who finally says “I do” realizes in her soul that all of life’s past experiences were simply a prelude to bring her to that fulfilling moment.

⁵ Revelation 17:14.