

The Whole Armor of God

It is amazing how one study will take a sharp right turn and into a different (albeit connected) field of thought. When considering the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians he concluded his writing with an admonition to "put on the whole armor of God," in order to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:11).

As I reflected on the comment (for who knows how many times over the past 43 years), a question came to mind, i.e., from what standpoint did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to make use of warfare, and the armament essential to victory?" (And so, the research began).

The life of the apostle Paul had many turns, trials, victories, and rejections. He said, of himself, "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches." (2 Cor. 11:22-28). And of his labor in Ephesus, he said the Corinthians, "If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

Paul's motivation stemmed from, this point: "For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep" (1 Cor. 15:16-20).

As we reflect upon the life of Paul we find that he was familiar with, just by virtue of been-there -did-that, advanced education, having been "brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day" (Acts 22:3); "a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees: touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6). Paul was familiar with the doctrines of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17). Paul was Roman born (Acts 22:28), and stood before nobility (Acts 26:1), leaders of military rank, and as Paul put it, "I am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city," (Acts 21:39), a city, of which it is said, "Hellenization of the city began in the days of Alexander the Great; this influence was fully felt by the Jews, who had been colonized at Tarsus by the Seleucids about 170 B.C." Thus, Paul would have been familiar with Greek history, language and culture (Jewish Encyclopedia). In Paul's instructions to Timothy, he refers to the Greek games (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 2:5). While Paul was imprisoned in Rome he was known of, "the whole praetorian guard" and "they that are of Caesar's household" (Phil. 1:13; 4:22).

Utilizing these experiences and knowledge, and the work of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul was inspired to use this information in order to instruct nations, as he said of himself “I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome.” (Rom. 1:14). And as the Lord told the twelve, “And when they bring you before the synagogues, and the rulers, and the authorities, be not anxious how or what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what ye ought to say” (Lk. 12:11-12). The apostle Paul was well equipped, as were others, through his instruction to provide the servants of God, through teaching, the gospel of Christ, knowing “there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons. This testimony is true. For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:10-14).

Throughout Paul's writings there is general theme associated with his proclamation of the gospel, i.e., that it is a warfare.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he said, “This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which led the way to thee, that by them thou mayest war the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). The warfare, in which Timothy was to engage, Paul refers to as, “the good fight of the faith,” to “lay hold on the life eternal” (1 Tim. 6:12).

This battle is first spiritual in nature: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full” (2 Cor. 10:3-6). Paul does not presume that the warfare is without temporal engagement: for he will later write, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:13-14). For you see, those with whom Paul encountered were indeed in the flesh, but their prince is none other than the devil himself, who, as an “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The servants of the devil, as they opposed themselves, “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2:2-3).

It is a foolish move to attempt to battle error by fleshly devices. Concerning his preaching, Paul said, “my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). It was through the preaching, i.e., the things

preached that the Holy Spirit demonstrated the power of God. Paul said, “So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). It is the power of God’s word, through the work of the Spirit, to “convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged” (Jn. 16:8-11) to reveal that the “unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” and to convict the unrighteous that they may “Be not deceived,” but rather turn from fornication, idolatry, adultery, immoral conduct of the effeminate, and abusers of themselves with men, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, and those thus convicted have the opportunity to be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The evidence of the power of God’s word is manifested in the effects it has upon the heart of men, and women, who have been torn apart by the devil and his devices, and hear the message: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:1-7).

That there is a warfare, in which the souls of men and women are at stake, those who engage therein must maintain an attitude to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Are you ready to “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). If your answer is no, then consider: “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16). Without the armor of God there is no hope in overcoming the wiles of the devil.

Now, I am tired.

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