

“Fight the Good Fight of Faith, Lay Hold on Eternal Life”

(1 Timothy vi. 12).

What stirring words of exhortation! Here is an enterprise for us; here an ambition; here an object in life. There could not be a higher, more noble, or promising one set before man. These rousing words were addressed specifically to one of God's faithful servants, Timothy, and indirectly to us as his brethren. Also, less directly, they may be said to speak to everyone having ears to hear, to whom in God's providence they come. " Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," " Lay hold on the life eternal" (R.V.), these are the words penned nearly two thousand years ago, and they have been, as it were, ringing in men's ears ever since, right through the ages, and in themselves sounding forth an invitation to a life which is " *life indeed*."

The Apostle so speaks of the life offered according to the Revised Version in verse 19 of this same chapter, in relation to those rich in good works—" Laying up for themselves," he says, " a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life, which is life indeed." These glowing words of this earnest apostle speak of that which, not only contains within itself the promises of a blessed life beyond compare, but of associated riches, honour and renown, such as the present life cannot offer, or could ever possibly fully enjoy ; the very things that men of ambition crave for and strive after, but never attain. Their fight proves itself only a " striving after wind," but " good soldiers of Jesus Christ " have a very real prize set before them, the value of which we have not now the capacity to adequately estimate or grasp. Nevertheless, let us aim to be wise in relation thereto. Let us reflect thereon, and do our very best to rightly appreciate, that the joy set before us may be our goal.

Failure to properly value on the part of many now will be the reason for the large proportion of disappointments presently that are indicated in Matt. xx. As we have said, these living words have been speaking to men right down the ages. What has been the response? Meagre, indeed!

Of course, in the completed aggregate, our Heavenly Father's family will be grand and glorious, but we are speaking now of the individual answer. How few have been the hearts that have been stirred and really captivated thereby in comparison to the multitudes of the human race that have taken the broad way! With the great majority through the ages, since this noble apostle's day, it has been a case (and is so now) of " one to his farm and another to his merchandise "; nevertheless, a " remnant " of those " sealed in their foreheads " during Rome's dark and cruel history have caught " the spirit of the prophecy " and have kept " the testimony of Jesus." They hid God's word in their hearts that they might not sin against Him, and there are some now in our day who have responded to the call, and having laid hold of it with full purpose of heart, will hope to the end for the grace to be brought at the appearing of our Lord Jesus. To speak again of our brethren of the past, those sealed in their foreheads during the history referred to: these were God's warriors, true soldiers of faith. They enrolled themselves with an eye to victory, having in view " the recompense of the reward." They fought the " good fight of the faith/" they endured bravely, and they fell as good soldiers. It would be impossible for us to depict or realize the terrible sufferings through which many of them passed. The " souls under the altar " and the blood of the " rivers and fountains of water " speak very loudly as to this.

Now, however, they are " hid in the ground " and the beloved apostle who penned the earnest words of which we now speak keeps them company. But although now silent in the grave, " they live unto God," and presently their night will be passed, the sun will arise, the morning will have come, and they will awake from their slumbers to the joyful realization of the fact. The nightmare of hardship and suffering through which they came, preceding their sleep, will serve to enhance the rapturous ecstasy of the glorious dawn that will have come. They will all have "fought the good fight of the faith," and will have " laid hold on the life eternal," and they will stand with the joyous " general assembly " around Jerusalem's throne " with palms in their hands " as their symbol of victory.

How obtained they their victory? In the first place, evidently through strong convictions in regard to the glorious enterprise for which they had engaged themselves at their Captain's invitation. Secondly, by being well equipped with the right weapons for the fight. And thirdly, by giving careful attention in the fight to their Commander's instructions and example, being also energised by his encouraging words: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome." Now, as to the first point. Have we taken hold of this fight for the life with strong convictions, as did these victors of the past? Have we caught a portion of the real spirit of faith manifested in them? We shall never succeed in the fight and have the pleasure of their company as victors unless we have, or do.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," said the Apostle John (1 John, v. 4). Without a faith rooted in a knowledge and confidence of the word of God (as we are told) it is impossible to please Him. Why? Because a lack of the same renders us too flabby of heart to come through the trials and tests that are absolutely necessary, and we cannot please the Father of all if we fail here, or be fit for the glorious destiny in which He purposes to use us. There must be no whittling down or trifling with commands or precepts that pinch or go against the grain. Such teaching respecting Christ's commands cuts at the very foundation of our test of fidelity and discipline for the Kingdom of God; or as Bro. Roberts puts it in his "*Visible Hand of God*" (in speaking of our Lord's commands), "It is a test of obedience and a means of discipline and spiritual development for those who are called as the sons of God and the Divine rulers of mankind in the age to come."

Faith is not made robust by shielding it from that which will try it. A living faith in this promised "life eternal," that has been tried, and has stood the test, is, therefore, a very precious possession, assuring to the possessor thereof praise, honour and glory in due time (1 Peter 1-7), but to be of this sterling quality, it must be well grounded in a knowledge and heart's belief of the Scriptures in their entirety. It must not be a "may be true affair" with us or a "my religion" as per orthodoxy. Such is not the faith of God's elect, but rather a dangerous counterfeit, a counterfeit that large ecclesias especially are liable to be tainted with or afflicted by, and the "Birmingham Trouble" is a characteristic result. Neither will the genuine article allow us to speak of the Truth as "Christadelphianism." We have heard some speak in this way. No, the faith of God possessed by Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel and all the suffering prophets was not of this quality. Oh, no! Their's was a "full assurance of faith/" or they would not have come through as they did.

Such is the faith that gives God pleasure and is that which He is pleased to account as righteousness, and that will "lay hold on the life eternal." Are we manifesting this, and affording God pleasure by the way in which we have laid hold upon the hope set before us? If so, we shall not be of those who worry themselves with emulation and strife, fleshly jealousies or envyings. The glorious thing that we have espoused will rather knit us together in the same absorbing enterprise, binding us together with the bond that cannot be broken now, and that will last for ever, even after faith will have accomplished its blessed work, and death is swallowed up in victory. "I am persuaded," said the Apostle, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation (R.V.) shall be able to separate us from the love of God." This presupposes the genuine article; this is the kind of faith that will successfully "fight the good fight."

The evidence as a basis for such is abundant; it is too copious to be marshalled now in detail, but there is the "sure word of prophecy"—prophecy regarding Israel—reaching right down to our own day, the fulfillment of which we ourselves have witnessed, and do now witness.

There is also the accurate prophetic delineation of Gentile national history to the present day. And how convincing to an earnest mind, if thoroughly weighed, is the contrast between that which the Bible brings before us as salvation, and the way of salvation, and that which man invents when left to himself! So left, he inevitably produces or reverts to pagan ideas, and God's way (i.e., by a resurrection from the dead) is scouted as a thing incredible." God's way is a *redemption* from death. Man's way is a *denial* of death. The more this contrast is pondered, the stronger will its force for earnest conviction be felt.

There is also the marvel of the Apocalypse. Inexplicable absolutely to all, but "the servants of Jesus." How convincing is this fact, and in conclusion under this head, who can understandingly and honestly read some of the prophecies as to individuals of the past and look at their providential fulfillment without being convinced that the word and hand of the living God is unmistakably therein manifest? Take the cases of Jeroboam, Baasha, Ahab and Jezebel. Of Jeroboam, God said: "I will cut off thy house." This was carried out to the very letter by Baasha, who conspired against his son Nadab, slew him and all his father's house. Of Baasha it was said: "I will take away the posterity of Baasha and make his house like the house of Jeroboam." This was fulfilled absolutely. His son Elah was slain by one of his captains (Zimri) whilst drunk, and Zimri also exterminated Baasha's house.

And speaking of Ahab, God said: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood even thine." And they did. God further said: That He would make Ahab's house "as the house of Jeroboam," and Jehu later fulfilled this word, together with that spoken concerning Jezebel: "The dogs (said God) shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." And this the dogs did.

The fulfillment of these predictions was brought about quite providentially yet very surely in each case, and the history pertaining to the same is altogether too circumstantial to be reasonably doubted. Therefore, let us plant the roots of our faith deeply into this ground, so provided for us, for this purpose by God.

Now we come to the matter of equipment. It is a fight that we are engaged in and we must arm ourselves for it with proper weapons. Fleshly weapons will not do. "The weapons of our warfare," says the beloved Apostle, "are not carnal" (2 Cor. x. 4). What are carnal weapons? A carnal weapon is a product or device of the flesh with carnal intent; that is, a weapon devised by the flesh for the forcible obtainment (against resistance) of its own desires. The efficiency or otherwise of such a weapon does not affect the principle involved. A policeman's baton, his revolver, or his hip-dangling sword, when used at the dictation of flesh, whether his own flesh or another's, is as much a carnal weapon as the largest monster of iniquity looming threateningly from a towering warship

The carnality of a weapon is not altogether determined by its efficiency, material or shape, but rather by the spirit, intent, or impulse of the individual provider or wielder. A walking-stick accordingly may be as much a carnal weapon as a shaft of steel.

Before leaving the question of degree, we would reduce our illustration to a finer point. The speaker has witnessed, as probably some of our readers have, a child even of irresponsible years, lay hold of a thing at hand, or use its own hand, as a weapon against an attempt to interfere with the attainment of a thing coveted—a carnal weapon. And thus it has been since Adam's fall with rebellious human nature. It is impatient of restraint.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you," says the Apostle James. "Come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your members?" "Ye lust and have not, ye kill, and desire to have (covet, R.V.) and cannot obtain," etc. It was thus with those who were going astray and committing spiritual adultery with the enemy in the Apostle's day, and we see the development in the powers of Christendom to-day. Christendom in this has become a fullblown constitution of sin (diabolos). "Good soldiers of Jesus Christ" will, therefore, refuse to wear its badge, carry its sword or truncheons, and those who would or do are not soldiers of Jesus "fighting the good fight of faith," neither will they "lay hold on the life eternal." Oh, no! the fiat has gone forth from the Captain of our Salvation, our Great Leader, that the sword must not be used by soldiers of His at the dictation of flesh. "He that takes the sword," says He, "shall perish with the sword," and who will presume to doubt that thus it shall be? God's word does not, and will not fail, and, therefore, we may depend upon it that the sword will perish from the earth together with all those who use it (or any other carnal weapon) in disobedience or defiance of the interdict.

Further, shall we be guilty of overstraining matters if we affirm that the word "sword" of the interdict is a representative word, and embraces every weapon that the word "sword" stands for, or is the synonym of? We think not. Every carnal weapon comes within the scope of the interdict, and the Scriptures give warrant in saying that even the tongue as such does not escape. The words of the tongue can be as "drawn swords." It will be our wisdom, therefore, to "take heed to our spirit" in this matter if we would "lay hold" of the promised "life." The "word" has been spoken and it is the "word" that will judge us at "the last day."

Now, as to the right weapons, and their use. We repeat, it is a fight that we are engaged in, a fight for life, for life indeed; and the successful soldier will be greater than he that taketh a city with carnal weapons. To succeed, we must be armed, properly armed, and we must pay attention to our Leader's instructions and example. The Apostle Peter, in the IVth chapter of his 1st Epistle, indicates the nature of the equipment. In speaking of our Lord's struggle, he says: "Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Therefore it is a mental armament. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus," said the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, and in his letter to the Ephesians he exhorts us to take "the whole armour of God," which he specified as a girdle of "truth" for the "loins," a breastplate of righteousness for protection, a preparation of the gospel of peace for shoes. "Above all," said he, "the shield of faith" to ward off the "darts of the wicked." "The helmet of salvation" and "the sword of the spirit" (or word of God), and withal to pray and watch always. Now, as to our Commander's example. The Lord of Glory was perfectly clad with this armour. His helmet was indeed "the hope of salvation," and, therefore, for "the joy set before Him," He endured bravely and "despised the shame," and is now "crowned with glory and honour" and life.

He was girt about "with truth," hence he is now established as the "faithful and true one." As to the "shield of faith," His faith in the Father was absolutely perfect and sincere, hence He at all times committed Himself to "him that judgeth righteously." With reference to His feet, they carried Him everywhere doing good and preaching the gospel (or glad tidings) of peace. And the sword of the spirit He wielded flawlessly, both subjectively and objectively. He was ready with the word of God for every emergency. With the point of this sword He was able to make His enemies writhe, and also by its skilful use make the heart of His friends "burn within them."

To His enemies, thus: "Have ye not read what David did?" (1 Sam.). "David calleth him 'Lord,' how is he then his son?" (Psa. cxviii.). "This people's heart is waxed gross" (Isa. vi.). "I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea and Samuel). "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner" (Psa. cxviii.). "That the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush" (Ex. iii.).

To His friends: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," and much more, of course, could be said.

Thus He made their "hearts burn," and in the cxix Psalm, He lets us into the secret of His skill, "Thy word have I hid in my heart." "How love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day." "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation." Here is our Captain's example. And then as to personal discipline, "when He was reviled He reviled not again." Just look at this: "He hath a devil and is mad. Why hear ye him." Again, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?" "How were they answered?" Ye do dishonour me! "Was there ever the like? And, again, when His enemies were scheming and plotting in envy to take His life away under the false charge of breaking the Sabbath, rather than a scathing denunciation, we get a restrained yet searching question only: "Which is right (or lawful), to do good or to do evil, to save life or destroy it?" And, further, when they took up stones to actually stone Him: "Many good works," said He, "have I shewn you from the Father; for which of these do ye stone me?"

"Later, when before the High Priest, because of the cogency with which He answered a question of his, He was struck by an officer (with a rod, the Revised Version says); therefore, a stinging blow probably (and this in public, when resentment is more readily stirred), yet the only reply

was: " If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

What an example of a "sheep among wolves"! Look also at His merciful kindness and compassion toward His friends at a time when nature longed for company and support! " My soul is exceeding sorrowful," said He, "tarry ye here and watch with me." They failed in weakness, yet all that comes of it is the plaintive, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

We say again, this is our Captain's example, and it is for us to bear the same in mind in our interpretation of our instructions as "good soldiers." Let brethren everywhere cease to make excuses against their stringency, and cherish not reservations. Have we not here, in the conduct of our Lord, an interpretation of them for use in actual practice? And He is a Victor!

Now, as briefly as possible, let us look at our instructions, viz.: Be brave, "endure hardness as good soldiers"; seek victory before everything; let not temporary exigencies hinder you in the fight (Matt. vi. 33). Be patient in the trials of the fight (Romans vii. 12). Hope to the end for victory (1 Peter i. 13). Try and associate joyfulness with hope (Romans xii. 12). Be tenacious in the fight; let not a position gained be lost (1 John, verse 8). Fight in "unity of spirit" with fellow soldiers (Col. iii. 13; Eph. iv. 3). As such, help to "bear each others burdens," i.e., in thoughtfulness, come to each other's aid in difficulty (Gal. vi. 2. 1 Thes. v. 14). In no case "speak evil" of fellow soldiers (Jas. 4. 11). Don't misjudge or "condemn them." Be very careful as to this (Matt. vii). Treat them with courtesy and love them with " pureness of heart " (1 Peter 1, 22, chap. 3-8). In character be " harmless as doves " (Matt, x, 16). Don't resist evil as the Gentiles do (Matt. v. 39). Be chastened in spirit, not soon angry and spiteful (Eph. iv. 31; Col. iii. 13-15). Pray for spiteful users and persecutors (Matt, v. 44). Be not ostentatious in doing good. Look to the end, seek praise from the Supreme Authority (Matt. vi. 1). Persistently read and reflect upon our Book of Instructions (1 Tim. iv. 13). Be careful, on guard (Mark xiii. 37), and always ask for all necessities (Phil. iv. 6); be not a partaker of another soldier's wrong doing (1 Tim. v. 22). Don't fraternise with the enemy or copy his ways (1 John ii. 15). Of course, much could be said in extension of these instructions (or commands) as to their pressing importance, but space now forbids. What our Lord says in regard to His sayings in Matthew vii. 24-25, as to a good foundation will apply; therefore, our life (i.e., the " life indeed ") depends upon our giving earnest and careful attention to them.

Now, in conclusion, just a word or two as to victory (i.e., the joy of victory). Will our imagination enable us to realize in some measure what being swallowed up of life will mean? What the joyful ecstasy of being able to say, "Behold, I am alive for evermore!" Not alive with anxiety, fear, pain, weariness and sorrow, but alive as possessors of that "Blessing of the Lord," spoken of in Proverbs x. 22, to which He "addeth no sorrow."

If we would have a vivid picture of the exultation of the victors in this "good fight of faith," let us read and ponder chapters xiv, xv, and xix of the Apocalypse. Once grasp victory and what a vista then becomes open to us!

J. Bellamy. Taken from September-October 1930 Berean