

winning the invisible war E.M. Bounds

Very Good

tion: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41) Still the flesh is weak, and watchfulness must always be united with prayer while we are in the flesh.

Chapter Sixteen

WEAPONS THAT WORK

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For 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. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"---Ephesians

6:10-18

Many prayers have missed the mark and been in vain because they were not combined with careful vigilance. There are many sad failures in Christian life because watchfulness failed. The devil's easiest target is a sleepy Christian. Many Christians have lost their souls because they failed to stay alert to Satan's attacks. Eternal vigilance is the price of political liberty. No less a price must be paid for our spiritual safety. The foolish virgins missed heaven because they failed in this virtue. Watchfulness would have brought them, along with the bridegroom, into the high joys of heaven's most celebrated hour.

In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, as stated above, the entire warfare with the devil and his legions is described. It also gives the sources of defense and victory. In this passage we have a view of the strenuous conflict and the battlefield on which the issues of eternity are tossed.

#### Satan's Army

"For 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" (verse 12). The Christian's battle is with the devil and his methods. Satan's struggle is arranged with order, wisdom, and skill.

Principalities and powers are under his management and subject to his orders. They are his lieutenants, his prime ministers, his captain generals

who carry out his orders and represent him fully. They are the world rulers with worldwide control and power. They master and control all the evil forces of the world. The devil and his high comrades are world rulers. Their might is as extensive as the world. There is a fearful rule for evil, against the good and against man. Their subordinates, the rank and file, are innumerable and invincible, except to a God-equipped man.

What a vast and powerful array of aggressive, vicious, and cruel enemies. They are in heavenly places, the very place where Christ's power is located. This power is over us, above us, and around us. They are too mighty for us. Against this invisible, innumerable, all-powerful, and vast array, we *wrestle*. Wrestling is a close conflict. It is an intense and difficult conflict which tests all strength and strains every fiber. It is hand-to-hand, foot-to-foot, close contact.

This conflict is not with men, though men may give us much opposition in our Christian course. Our chief trouble and our great war is not with man but with all the mighty evil forces of the devil. It is a life and death struggle—a war for heaven and hell, for time and eternity.

#### The Christian Soldier

The Christian must be a soldier by birth, by fortune, by trade. The most essential quality of a divine soldier is that he is not entangled "with the affairs of this life" (2 Timothy 2:4). The elements

of self-denial, courage, and endurance are the vital characteristics of this military training.

Strength is the fruit of these high qualities. But it is strength far beyond his own strength. "Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). In preparation for this war, the Christian soldier must look beyond himself. The strength of God, the very strength of God's almightiness, must be his.

The ability to stand, to fight, to conquer, and to drive the foe from the field will be found in God's armor. God's strength is imparted through God's armor. No power short of God can enable us to meet the devil. No partial equipment will suffice.

We are charged twice to make doubly sure to take the *whole* armor. We take God by taking His armor. We must make His armor our own. We put on God by putting on His armor—not outside but inside, not objective but subjective, not physical but spiritual. Christ made the armor, and the Holy Spirit puts it on us and makes it ours.

We have to fight through to the end, and having done all, to stand. We must first withstand and then stand. We gain and hold and then advance. Stand ready for the fight and stand in the fight.

#### Truth And Righteousness

We must be strong for *the truth* in the inward parts. We are not imaginary soldiers fighting an imaginary war—all is real and true. Because he is truthful, a girded soldier is strong, prepared, and intense in his fight. Truth is the ornament of a

jeweled girdle, a diamond set in gold. We must conquer the devil by truth as the strength and support of our lives. We know the truth and have the truth because we have Christ who is the truth.

Heart righteousness makes head righteousness and life righteousness. We cannot fight without heart righteousness. The "*breastplate of righteousness*" protects the heart and makes us feel right. The old heart cannot be made right by the most skillful craftsman or by the most correct rituals. No tinkering on the old heart can make it right. It is as hard as a stone and crooked as the Jordan. No melting can make it soft, and no human effort can make it straight. We need a new heart soft as flesh and washed whiter than snow in the blood of Christ. A piece of Christ's heart—perfect, right, pure, and good—this is what is needed.

#### Preparation And Faith

The feet must be shod with a *preparation* which is always ready to go, to do, and to suffer. This means no slow movements or reluctant doing of God's will. Being off guard creates a general unreadiness for life or death, for earth or heaven, for sacrifice or service, for doing or for suffering. It cuts the nerve of Christian valor and lays us open to surprises and crushing defeats. Always ready is the soldier's attitude of safety, and being ready to move precedes victory. Wakeful vigilance assures us of victory against the devil.

The "*shield of faith*" is the all-important and the all-covering piece of armor. The devil lets his

fiery, poisoned darts fly. But faith catches them as they are directed at head or heart and quenches them.

Do you believe all victories are possible to the soldier who is valiant and strong in faith? There has never been a battle planned by hell's most gifted strategist which can conquer faith. All its flaming and terrible darts fall harmless as they strike against the shield of faith. "These all died in faith" (Hebrews 11:13). Faith made their death the crowning point. Faith brought to their dying hour the spoils of their victories.

### The Helmet And Sword

"The helmet" protects the head. Bear in mind that head-salvation and heart-salvation, real and full, are stronger than brass to protect the head. A heart fully saved holds the head firmly to truth and righteousness, as the anchor holds the ship in stormiest seas. "The hope of salvation," says Paul in Thessalonians, is the helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

The Christian soldier must put heaven strongly in his head and heart. He must see heaven, feel heaven, and keep heaven in the eye and in the heart all the time. He will stand with unsteady step if heaven seems far off. He will fight feebly if heaven is dimly seen. The full sight of heaven will give strength to his loins, zeal to his faith, glory to his future, and victory to the present.

The head will never be pierced while hope is its helmet. Nurture hope, strengthen hope, and

brighten hope, for we are "saved by hope" (Romans 8:24). We must "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

"The sword," the aggressive and powerful weapon, is the Word of God. The Spirit wields it, and brings death to all our foes. The Word of God is our battlefield and victorious weapon. On it we stand and fight. With it we deal and defeat and ruin every foe. The Christian soldier is "not to live by bread alone, but by every word . . . of God" (Matthew 4:4). We cannot make too much of the Word of God. Christ foiled Satan with it. If we are to be valiant, true, and invincible, we also must have the Word of God dwelling in us richly.

The shield of our faith is the basis of our prayers and the essence of our girded truth. Head, hands, and hearts must be filled and saturated with God's Word: by it we live and by it we grow. It is our battle call and the sign by which we conquer. It is a glittering royal blade against all the assaults of Satan. "It is written" goes like steel to the heart of Satan.

As a weapon of defense and offense, God has magnified His Word above all His name. Those who are filled with God's Word are armed against all Satan's wiles and his devices. God's Word is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4:12). Satan feels it penetrating his joints and marrow, dissolving into weakness all his strength and making foolish

all his wisest plans.

### The Weapon Of Prayer

The soldiers in the warfare against the devil must understand how to wear the armor of all prayer. The demand is for "all prayer" (Ephesians 6:18) at all seasons, in the intensest form, with a deep sense of personal need for God. Prayer must deepen and intensify into supplication. The Holy Spirit will help us into this kind of mighty praying and clothe us with this resistless power of prayer.

This intense conflict with the devil requires sleepless vigilance, midnight vigils, and a wakefulness which cannot be surprised. It also requires a perseverance which knows neither halting, fainting, nor depression. This kind of praying knows by clear spiritual intelligence what it needs. The prayer warrior knows the unlimited provisions that are available to supply all his needs. He knows the necessity of perseverance in prayer until the need is supplied and the provision is secured.

This kind of praying holds itself in loving sympathy with the entire family of God, making their conflicts, dangers, and needs its own. It is on the line of battle with the whole family of God. It takes on their enemies, their safety, and their dangers. "Supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18) gives victory to every saint. The line of battle is one. Defeat or victory must come to all. The soldier fully equipped in God's armor is a veteran against the devil and invincible to all of his

attacks.

It is not an easy thing to pray. Behind the praying there must lie the conditions of prayer. These conditions are possible, but they cannot be achieved in a moment by the prayerless person. They are always available to the faithful and holy, but cannot exist in a frivolous, negligent, and lazy spirit.

Prayer does not stand alone. It is not an isolated performance. Prayer is connected to all the duties of the Christian life. Prayer issues from a character which is made up of the elements of a vigorous and commanding faith. Prayer honors God, acknowledges His being, exalts His power, adores His providence, and secures His aid.

A skeptic would rationalize and cry out against devotion charging that it does nothing but pray. But to pray well is to do all things well. If it is true that devotion does nothing but pray, then it does nothing at all. The conditions of prayer are the sum of all the energized forces of practical working Christianity.

### The Power Of Prayer

Prayer brings God into the situation with commanding force. "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons," says God, "and concerning the work of My hand command ye Me" (Isaiah 45:11).

We are charged in God's Word: "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17); "in everything by prayer" (Philippians 4:6); "continuing instant in prayer" (Colossians 4:2); to "pray everywhere"

(1 Timothy 2:8): "praying always" (Colossians 1:3).

The promise is as unlimited as the command is comprehensive. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). Jesus said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask" (John 14:13): "if ye shall ask any thing" (John 14:14): "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:17): "Whatsoever ye ask the Father... He will give it you" (John 16:23).

If there is anything not involved in "all things whatsoever" or not found in the phrase, "ask any thing," then these things can be left out of prayer. Language could not cover a wider range or involve more fully every detail of life. These statements are only samples of the all-comprehending possibilities of prayer under the promises of God to those who meet the conditions of right praying.

These passages, though, give only a general outline of the immense regions over which prayer extends its influence. The effect of prayer reaches and secures good things from regions which cannot be covered by language or thought. Paul exhausted his language and thought when he was praying. Still, he was conscious of necessities not covered, realms of good not reached, and of battles over enemies not conquered.

Paul covers these undiscovered regions by this general plea: "Unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). The promise is, "Call unto Me, and I

will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).