

OUR CONFLICT

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This expression, “OUR CONFLICT” is found in Eph. 6:12, Diaglott translation. Since the 11th verse is related, we consider the two verses together: “Put on the complete armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the crafty ways of the enemy. Because our conflict is not with blood and flesh, but with the governments, with the authorities, with the potentates of this darkness, with the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenlies.”

Our common version Bible uses the term “wrestle” (V. 12)—“we wrestle” not against flesh and blood. While this word “wrestle” conveys a correct thought, nevertheless it apparently is not the proper translation. “Our Conflict”—“Our Struggle” or “Our Fight” would be better translations.

The Apostle refers to “Our Good fight of faith” in 1 Tim. 6:12. The Diaglott presents a milder thought—“Let us maintain the Good Contest of The Faith.” It is a good contest or good fight because is one against evil things. So in Eph. 6:12 there is no thought of a physical combat.

The armour referred to is a symbolic one, though the illustration was taken from a literal armour and a literal soldier. The Weymouth translation gives a further thought saying: “For ours is not a conflict with mere flesh and blood.” Certainly human instrumentality is involved in this our conflict, but it goes beyond this. The Apostle in the Diaglott translation uses the terms Governments, Authorities, Potentates of this darkness. All of these words suggest a power. He sums them all up with the words: “The spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenlies.” This is a reference to evil or wicked spirit beings.

The Weymouth translation seems to give clear thoughts as to whom the enemies are. “Put on the complete armour of God, so as to be able to stand firm against all the stratagems [tricks or schemes to deceive] of the devil. For ours is not a conflict with mere flesh and blood, but with despotisms, the empires, the forces that control and govern this dark world—the spiritual hosts of evil arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare.” Again the summation of all the powers mentioned are found in the words: “The spiritual hosts of evil”—then of course the translation goes on to say these are arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare. Our Conflict consists in resisting this force of evil.

The Apostle tells us that “The whole world lies under the evil one.” (1 John 5:19, Diaglott) The Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 4:4 speaks of this evil one as the god of this world. The “god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not... lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God should shine unto them.” The

prophet in Isa. 25:7 refers to the veil that is spread over all nations—a veil of ignorance concerning the plans and purposes of God. If it were not for the fact that God permitted the Adversary to have this power, it could never be so. We are so aware that the truth is a thousand times more reasonable than Satan’s error—such truth would rapidly prevail against him if it were not for his crafty ways—his shifting of the scenes for the very purpose of deceiving. Since the Adversary does have power to deceive—the power to hold many in darkness—how meaningful to us are the words of 1 Peter 2:9, “That we should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us: OUT OF DARKNESS into His marvelous light.”

Indeed if our Heavenly Father had not “called us”—had not “drawn us” we would still be in that darkness—“darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people.” The Adversary has the world in general—he has the majority in his power. The ones then that he is especially determined to oppose are those who have been called out—you and I. OUR CONFLICT is not merely with flesh and blood, but with the spiritual hosts of evil arrayed against us, in the heavenly warfare.

We recognize that such a reference to these evil spirits is not intended to fill us with fear. No admonition from the Lord is intended to arouse our fleshly fears—it is intended to arouse our spiritual thinking and thus our judgement. If we heed the words of the Apostle here in Eph. 6:12, we are enabled to see the dangers that lie in our path, and thus the need of maintaining a standard of truth and righteousness.

The special truth we would hold up in our day is the Gospel Age Harvest Message; and the building of a character in harmony with it—we have a standard of Truth and righteousness. Anytime we are presented with such sobering thoughts (as in Eph. 6) there comes with them a compensating exhortation. For instance, the Apostle in 1 Peter 5:8 informs us—“Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.” Prior to such information came the exhortation—be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary is so opposed to you. He goes on in verse 9—“whom resist steadfast in the faith.”

Another Apostle referring to the spirit of anti-Christ (that which is opposed to Christ) and the holy spirit of truth states: “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” Again we have the serious and sobering thought that the spirit of error does exist and that in great measure. And this is compensated for by the great truth that the Holy Spirit far exceeds in power the spirit of error.

The same pattern is followed by the Apostle Paul in our text of Eph. 6. Before and after relating to us that we have this unseen evil power to cope with, he refers to a protection in offset to the enemy—verses 11 and 13 refer to the whole or complete “armour of God.”

We recall that this Apostle was shipwrecked on his journey to Rome. All aboard the ship escaped to the Island of Melita (Acts 28). After a three-month stay on this island, he departed, stopping at two or three other ports, finally reaching his intended destination—that of Rome. All the while Paul had been a prisoner and continued to be after reaching Rome: “And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him” (guarded him, Diaglott).

Just as our Lord used those things around him for the sake of illustrations (the harvest fields, the vineyards, the lilies of the field)—so with Paul: he grasped the opportunity to present a lesson to the church with the Roman soldier and his armour as a backdrop. According to the 20th verse of Eph. 6, Paul was chained to this soldier and would certainly have much opportunity to study the armour this soldier wore.

There was the girdle, the breastplate, the sandals, the shield, the helmet and the sword. Briefly these represented: consecration, justification, a peaceful disposition, faith, intellectual understanding and appreciation of the truth, the Word of God and how to handle that Word.

To be fully consecrated: always consecrated to the service of the truth; determined to set aside the will of the flesh, doing only the Heavenly Father’s will—requires great fortitude, but if this is done, it is a protection to the New Creature. To maintain a consecrated attitude it is necessary to recognize the Lord’s standard of justice and the fact that we are justified by his arrangement—we need ever to be covered by that robe of righteousness. The parable of the wedding garment would have its companion lesson here. (Matt. 22) Further, the peace of God which passes all human understanding must become a part of us—a desire too to be as peaceable as possible—“so far as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

And then how important our faith as indicated by the shield—the shield of faith. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” To be convinced of the truth, as represented by the helmet, means a continual searching of the Scriptures—proving the volumes to be studies in the Scriptures—making the truth our own. And then the skillful use of the Word of God. Our Lord’s method of resisting temptation was to use that Word in the proper place and at the proper time—saying “it is written.” Just as the Apostle Peter suggests to us: “Be ready always to give an answer [a scriptural answer] to every man that asketh you; a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Having the Truth and the Spirit of the Truth, is a protection. It is like an armor—Christian armor. We can well imagine the disaster of the soldier in Paul’s day who went into battle without his armor. And surely as we endeavor to be successful in “our conflict” (our daily conflict), we see the need of the protection that our symbolic armor

affords. We need to hold to the truth in its doctrinal features; but we need also to have the spirit of the truth—reverence for our Lord and Head and our Heavenly Father. We must have a love for our brethren as well as a love for the world.

As Paul emphasizes the need of this armor, he also emphasizes a particular time in which it will be especially needed—THE EVIL DAY (V. 13) The closer we get to the completion of the church, the more EVIL the day becomes, the day in which we live, the time when the old order and everything that goes with the old order is being pushed out; so that the new order may be established.

Apparently spiritism, the devil and his angels, will play a major part in the great trouble just before us. We would expect to see this come into existence more and more as the evil day progresses—and so it has been. As an instance—there has been a tremendous increase in the sale of occult literature—the most popular subject is witchcraft.

Occult means to hide—something hidden or concealed, secret. The idea promoted by the makers and merchants of such literature is that a person must be of a certain class to fully understand it. The special class needs only to possess what nearly all mankind does possess—an active curiosity: this gets them involved. And indeed more and more are becoming involved in this sort of thing. We see increasing numbers of articles in magazines and newspapers—“your horoscope.” A chart of the Zodiacal signs is used, and depending on which sign you were born under and the position of the planets, one is supposed to learn something of his future. This may seem to be a harmless thing; and to some it may be, but it appears to be some of the fringes of spiritism. It would appear to be an opening or wedge for greater involvement in occult things.

Also on the increase is the advertisements for hypnosis clinics. In the yellow pages of the Seattle phone book there are no less than 12 such advertisements—by comparison with something less than this in years past. This is set forth as accomplishing good things, especially the healing of one defect or another, common to the fallen human race. The “American clinic of Hypnosis” of Seattle advertises this way: Modern hypnosis to help you to improve—1. To reduce weight; 2. To break bad habits; 3. Build self confidence; 4. Increase concentration and memory retention; 5. To alleviate nervous tension.

The dictionary describes hypnosis saying: A sleep-like condition physically induced, usually by another person, in which the subject is in a state of altered consciousness and responds with certain limitations to the suggestions of the hypnotist. Whatever anyone says regarding the good that hypnosis can do or has done, to enter into it requires the giving over of one’s self to another, a breaking down to some degree of his own will, which is a dangerous thing. Again we have another opening or wedge for a greater breaking down of the human will. Here we have the fulfillment of the apostle’s words found in 2 Cor. 11:13, “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

We need to have great sympathy for the poor world. They are sin-sick and dying, ever conscious of their afflictions. They desire to be healed and they are genuinely deceived by these would-be healers. To what degree this deception will increase, we cannot know fully, but it is on the increase and since the apostle tells us that “OUR CONFLICT” is in the main a resistance of this evil power, we recognize the need of being prepared.

We recall that our Lord was charged with being Be-el-ze-bub, the prince of devils. He was further charged with doing his good work of healing with the power of the devil. Matthew 12:25, 26 records his reply, in part: “every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: how shall then his kingdom stand?” Mark 3:26 records the same incident—Mark records our Lord’s words: “and if Satan rise up against himself and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.”

Heb. 2:14 tells us that Satan has the power of death. On Reprint page 3187 we read: “Satan’s dominion is a dominion of death, and he undoubtedly has the power slightly to relieve the sick when his delusive purposes and doctrines would be best served thereby. (Heb. 2:14) The fact that Satan’s kingdom and its methods are thus divided and in opposition—working evil, sin and death, as ever, and at the same time turning to heal the sick in order the more securely to bind and blind his dupes in subtle errors, shows that the god of this world realizes that his reign of sin, ignorance, superstition and death is nearly at an end.” From our Lord’s words as well as those of the Pastor, we see that they suggested that the dominion of Satan was soon to end. Soon by comparison with the time and events that had passed. The time for his end is that much closer in our day. But until it does end, which evidently will be after the last member of the body of Christ has gone home, we see the need of resisting the influences of his dominion.

When the Apostle Paul directed us to resist the adversary and his host, he gave such directions as one who was experienced in resisting that force of evil. Acts 16:16-18 bears this out. Here was a direct resistance of an evil spirit “and it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us and cried saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days, but Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her; and he came out the same hour.” It would seem that any would be pleased to see an individual relieved of the possession of an evil spirit. But no (V. 19): “And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers.” The context shows that these two were greatly mistreated. (Vs. 23 and 24): “And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison charging the jailor to keep them safely; who having received such a charge, thrust them

into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

Verse 25 reveals the attitude of heart that both Silas and Paul had, and certainly we have all marveled upon reading this text: “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them.” What a witness!—to those about them at the time, and to the Lord’s people all the way through the age, who had the knowledge of it. Can we not see the strength these two displayed? Each of these brethren must have prepared themselves mentally in order to bear up under such treatment. How this would cause them to claim the promises. How often the apostles and others of the early church, suffered in this fashion; and how it must have forced them to dwell upon the many promises of their God. Certainly they would have to keep placing their thoughts back to where they belonged—that all this would work out for good eventually.

We wonder if the Apostle Paul might not have had the sentiments of the 91st Psalm in mind when he considered that soldier’s armor and its lesson to the Lord’s people. Verse 4 of Psalm 91: “His Truth . . . shall be thy shield and buckler”—part of an armor. In the 84th Psalm, verse 11 we read: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

We are quite familiar with the fact that the Apostle Paul had a special ministry—2 Cor. 11:28 reveals that he had the “care of all the churches.” Who was better qualified than the Apostle Paul to tell us about “OUR CONFLICT” and the source of our trials? A portion of his own trials is mentioned in verse 26 of that 11th chapter of 2 Cor. He lists some perils: perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils of his own country-men, perils by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren.

There are those who have had special responsibility before the Heavenly Father. We all have, but some have had a very special responsibility—our Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul, Pastor Russell and others not known so particularly by us. The peculiar trials of these would be especially severe; and they would need to call upon their God, and certainly consider those promises of help in every time of need.

The Lord has extended many promises to his people and they belong to each of us. Not only do we have promises but illustrations to help us appreciate them. The promise of Psalm 84:11 may seem insignificant if we do not give it sufficient thought. But we believe it is the basis for Brother Russell’s favorite hymn—#273. This particular Psalm begins with the thought that our God is a Sun and a shield—this should bring forth thoughts of brightness and cheer—the Lord God is a Sun: S-U-N.

There are times when the immediate circumstances of life are dark and foreboding. We’re not able to see things as clearly as we’d like. This is true of course in the experiences of all mankind: “There hath not a temptation taken you but such as is

common to man.” The difference is that we who know the Lord find ourselves completely out of harmony with our surroundings in the world. The things which afford some joy to the world mean little or nothing to us. The darkness that covers the earth because of Satan’s rulership could be depressing indeed, if it were not for this fact that the Lord is our sun. Clouds are a symbol of trouble in the scriptures, and certainly we have a few symbolic clouds in our trials. When the Lord sees that we have learned the needed lesson, he causes the dark clouds (as it were) to disappear. Sun of my soul, my Father dear; I know no night when thou art near. O! may no earth-born cloud arise, to hide thee from thy servant’s eyes.

The Lord is also a “Shield” unto his people. The Lord God is a sun and shield. We all have caught the picture of the mother hen shielding her young with her wings. That takes us to that 91st Psalm again, verse 4: “He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust.” To Abraham God said: “I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.” (Gen. 15:1) This was true of the Father of the faithful—it has been true of all God’s people since. In this promise, again the Lord uses a shield to symbolize the thought of protection. To Abraham, much of the protection was along physical lines. To us it is largely along spiritual lines—we are being protected as New Creatures. The attacks against us are made on the mind. The enemy’s arrows are often “bitter words” and deceptive words, lying words; words that are designed to cast doubt and instill fear into our hearts and minds. Is it any wonder the Apostle likened that soldier’s armor unto the truth? The truth is an armor, it does protect us against these poisoned darts of the Adversary.

The Psalmist goes on in that 84th chapter, 11th verse: “The Lord will give grace and glory.” To the Apostle Paul the Lord said “My grace is sufficient for thee.” This tells us that the Lord does give us a sufficiency of grace—He gives us what we need. Paul at one time felt that his one particular physical weakness was a hindrance to him in serving the Lord. He asked three times to have it removed. Somehow the Lord communicated to Paul that his grace was sufficient. No doubt each of us has some little weakness, some peculiarity that we would prefer not to have. We have that promise as it comes through the words of the Apostle Paul. We have a sufficiency of grace. As the Psalmist states: “The Lord will give grace.”

He will also give “glory.” The Apostle Peter refers to our fiery trials and in verse 13 of 1 Pet. 4 he tells us that in these we should “rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.” When the Lord’s glory is revealed—to the world, that is—we will be with him shining that glory. This is why the Apostle suggests that we should rejoice in our fiery trials. If we share in this sin-offering we will share also his glory. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 8:18: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” As the

Psalmist says, the Lord will give glory—this will be to those who are found faithful.

The text of Psalm 84:11 concludes with the thought that no good thing will be withheld from those who walk uprightly.

In James 1:17 we read about the “good gifts” from the Father. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights.” During the time that “OUR CONFLICT” is taking place, possibly one of our greatest dangers of losing in our conflict is that of permitting these good gifts of God to become commonplace. The “gift” of His Son would be first and foremost, the unspeakable “gift” referred to in 2 Cor. 9:15. Through His great sacrifice we have the genuine hope of seeking for glory, honor and immortality. At the present time we have the gift of the begetting of the Holy Spirit, referred to as the earnest of our inheritance. (Eph. 1:14)

The apostle refers to gifts in Eph. 4—apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. These are for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. The Scriptures abound with promises and if they are considered and claimed by us, they become a source of protection—an armor if you will.

The Scriptures indicate that the very last members of the Body of Christ, will have a special privilege of passing a special test: certain passages seem to indicate this. The reference in 2 Thess. 2:9-12 that has been considered so much in the recent past—we have been forced (as it were) in the light of conditions prevailing in the Bible Student world to examine these verses. “Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

In our studies of the Truth we have learned that these verses find a large measure of fulfillment in the development of the Papacy. The expression “STRONG DELUSION” finds a large measure of fulfillment after the death of Brother Russell. We believe we are going through a period of strong delusion at the present time. The Pastor comments on these verses on Reprint page 4397. The comments follow a sub-title “THE ELECT TO BE UNDECEIVABLE.” I quote: “The Scriptures abound with testimonies to the effect that the severe trials of the near future will be along the lines of deception. They speak of lying angels and deceivableness of unrighteousness and lying wonders and tell us that the Lord will send or permit a strong delusion that they may believe a lie. If we gain the right conception of the matter, these deceptions are to affect the whole world—including its wise men, and indeed practically everybody except the ‘very elect’: and the ‘very elect’ will be preserved not through their own wisdom or superiority, but through the

power of God, for there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders: insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Matt. 24:24.”

The fact that the Pastor expected strong delusion to affect the whole world implies that some great deception is yet to come. With all our tests and trials, if we knew exactly what they were going to be, they’d cease to be tests. So whatever is yet to come—it will be a test, not fully known in advance. But the Lord’s people will be prepared in advance. The Lord has made such a provision that we may meet these tests—if we avail ourselves of that provision.

One translation of 2 Tim. 1:7 says that “God hath not given us a spirit of timidity, but of courage, of love and of a sound mind.” There is a combination of Christian traits, that cannot be surpassed. The text indicates that the Lord has given these to us—they are not forced upon us.

We could never be successful in “OUR CONFLICT” without these traits—courage, love and a sound mind. We gain these things in the area of life’s experiences. That soldier that the apostle viewed in his day could slip his armor on with comparative ease; but not so with the symbolic armor. We may have certain natural tendencies that prevent us from fastening thoroughly one or another part of this armor provided by the Lord. For instance, few of us are naturally peaceful—we find it difficult perhaps to fasten properly those sandals of peace.

It takes a while, much practice, and then it requires the right kind of peace—not peace at any price, but the peace of God, that which would be acceptable in his sight, and one that would permit us to be content in all the experiences permitted to come upon us by the Lord.

No doubt all of us have begun to put that armor on. Quite likely many have it on. If we have begun, let’s finish that good work. He who endures to the end, shall be saved. If we feel we have it on, by all means let’s keep it on.

GIDEON’S ARMY IN ANTITYPE

Arise! Then, O! Army of Gideon,
Let him that is fearful return;
Jehovah wants only the zealous,
Whose hearts with the love of truth burn.

Ten thousand remain! Still too many;
Once more He their loyalty proves,
To see who most faithfully serves Him,
To see who most fervently loves.

O! ye, who have sworn Him allegiance,
Mark well! He is now testing you,
With the water of truth He will prove you,
To see who is loyal and true.

Look well to your drinking, then, brother,
That you no impurities trace,
Take your lamp, your pitcher and trumpet,
And stand every man in his place!

Your sword is the "Sword of the Spirit,"
Your lamp is the light from His Word,
Your pitcher, this poor earthen vessel,
You break at the voice of your Lord.

Is your lamp burning bright in your pitcher?
Doth your trumpet give forth "certain sound?"
Soon the Sword of the Lord and of Gideon
The enemy's host will confound.

For sure is the victory promised,
And great is the peace He awards—
Then, "stand" in your place, all ye faithful,
The battle's not yours, but the Lord's!

—Poems of Dawn, page 127.