

On Being Prepared

At this season when we pass from one year into the next we often review the events of the past, consider the changing trends we see before us, and then speculate as to what we might witness in the days ahead. While none of us knows what a single day may bring, it should be clear to all that we are living in rapidly changing times, that the world is presently making a far greater impact on the church than the church is on the world, and that, as Christians, we need to remember how our God (who does not change, James 1:17) calls us to stand in the ways and see, to ask for the old paths where the good way is, and to walk in it (Jeremiah 6:16).

This call to seek the old paths is not about doing the things we have always done, or about doing those things in the way we have always done them; it's about searching the Scriptures, pursuing the will of the Lord, and committing ourselves to pleasing Him. Was that not the way of our forefathers, of those who were so richly blessed before us? It's like Isaac digging again the wells his father Abraham had dug in a previous drought, and doing so, not out of habit, but because he was confident of his finding more water in those same wells – and, finding water there, he dug up even more of them (Genesis 26). Similarly, it's not about being afraid of every new thing we learn, but, following the example of the Bereans, we need to search the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17).

I had occasion recently to preach again on the spiritual warfare of Ephesians 6, where the soldier of the cross finds the call of God to shoe his feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace (v.15). This is a helpful reminder to us at any time, and something we must continue to do, yet it is particularly important now when we see our society so divided against itself and moral standards are quickly disintegrating. Christianity is under attack, and Satan, like a roaring lion who is prowling about seeking whom he may devour, loves to seize upon Christians, his most desired prey, when they are least aware of his presence and power, and when therefore they are most vulnerable to his wicked devices.

Can you imagine how it would interfere with any soldier's fighting skills if he went out onto the battlefield wearing the wrong footgear, wearing boots so heavy that he could only with the greatest difficulty lift his feet? How fast could he go with

those, and how far could he get? Clearly, every foot-soldier has to have quick and efficient mobility. In the same way, every Christian needs to be prepared for the battle before him, needs to be ready to fight the good fight of faith and to move with considerable speed, if he is to resist the devil and have him flee from him.

Consider the Christian who thinks that he is doing something special, maybe even exceptional and laudable, by going to a place of worship on a Sunday morning. When he first gets out of bed, he is not sure if he will even go to church – it is an effort, after all – but at last (as a matter of duty perhaps, or even out of mere habit) he decides to make the effort, hoping that the service will not be too long or too demanding. What is the matter with this fellow? How is it that he does not long for the sabbath day, for the services of worship, for those times of soul-feeding and seasons of spiritual refreshment which have been such a blessing to so many others? Well, I will tell you what his problem is: he is dead on his feet! He is not wearing the shoes of that peculiar readiness which the gospel of peace gives.

To be heavy-footed, slow moving and lethargic – having to be whipped up, as it were, and constantly pushed into doing what needs to be done, instead of running to it and rejoicing in it – is a regrettable misrepresentation of living the Christian life. People who have to drag themselves out to church get little or nothing out of the service, and it is not that there is nothing to get, necessarily, but that they are not personally equipped to take anything out.

What can the Christian do if he finds himself in such a weakened spiritual condition – if his hands hang down, his knees are feeble and he is barely able to stand – what can he possibly do to rid himself of that undesirable state of sluggishness and become a nimble-footed soldier of Christ? He needs to put on the shoes of that readiness which only the gospel of peace can provide.

Do you want to put a spring in your step, believer, and be happy to serve the Lord? Only as you think about the gospel – only as you consider what Christ has done for you, only as you meditate on what He has achieved for you, and continue to contemplate such things until you are constrained by them – only then will you wake up and find yourself raring to go!

Let me ask you, then, when was the last time that you really thought about the Lord Jesus Christ as your peace, as the One who broke down the middle wall of

division between men – creating in Himself one new man from the two – that He might reconcile both, not only to each other, but even more importantly to God the Father Himself, through the cross, and thereby putting to death once and for all the enmity between us? When was the last time you really thought about, and sought to think through, how in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for through Him who has established this bond of peace we both have access by one Spirit to the Father?

Do not tell me that you have thought about it carefully and that, still, it has not moved you. No, my friend, if you have been made a new creation in Christ Jesus, that cannot be! If you are a believer, think through these things again. We are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1), and, if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)!

Now, having considered such precious truths, and having weighed each benefit as a particular blessing to you, does it not drive away the superficiality of mere externals, the hollow formalities of a lifeless religion – all the things you did not really care about before, in fact, and now you see why – and give way to a genuine thirsting for God and hungering for righteousness? This, along with fervent prayer, crying out for all the help you need along the way, is the only means to become agile, to gain mobility and speed in your conflict with the principalities and powers which assail you, as well as to find joy and gladness in all your service to the Lord. You must first comprehend and be constrained by the love of Christ for you, believer – to know something of the width and length and depth and height of it – and by how no one, not even Satan and all the spiritual hosts of wickedness, can separate you from that love of God to you in Christ.

This, as I say, is the way to prepare for battle that you may stand your ground against the vain philosophies and ever-changing ideologies of our day. What other people, including many in positions of authority, are saying and doing may be very troubling to you. You need to address those issues, to be sure, yet how you do so is of great importance. If, on the one hand, you focus too much on the problem, it will increase your anxiety, worry and fear to the point that you are overwhelmed by it and you lose all hope. You will see society spiraling out of

control, plus your own life and that of your loved ones in grave danger. But if, on the other hand, you switch your focus to Christ, to the victory you have in Him and can do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13), the problem itself will seem much smaller and your own duty will appear much clearer. Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, you will gain a greater confidence in the Lord for seeing you through to the end of every trial and discover that He makes you ready, willing and able to resist the assaults of the devil.

Respectfully submitted,

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