

*Maranatha*

# Spiritual Warfare



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## *Entering The Battle*

Once we have listened to God's call and acknowledged Jesus as our Lord, we have entered a spiritual battle. WE do not always realise that this battle is for our minds, and that there are many ways we can be enticed to abandon our walk with God.

As we read the story of the people of Israel, prior to their entering the promised land, they were reminded to keep the laws of God, not to add to them nor to take anything away, to gather the people together to hear God's words, to teach their children and to worship the one true God alone and none other. (Deut. 4: 1-20). They were a covenant people who found time and again that they were unfaithful, having false gods, living by the letter of the law instead of by the spirit, of imitating the nations around them, but God was faithful to them, and in His love kept calling them back with words of reassurance. (Jer. 31 v.31-34).

## *The New Covenant*

As Christians we have entered the new covenant but do not always realise how many of our standards and attitudes are affected by the world around us. It is easy to find reasons to justify watering down Jesus' teachings. What will our friends and those in our church say when we really commit ourselves to Christ in our life style and in the way we spend our money? Are we prepared to be unpopular? Are our motives really pure or are we acting with a false humility? Are we making our gestures from time to time as so many outside the churches say?

Jesus knew his disciples were on a journey, that there would be failures and that they would realise their weaknesses and pride, that they would still be afraid at times and jealous at others. But He did not allow this to stop His love and forgiveness reaching out to them. He promised He would be with them always, even though they failed. He will not reject those who keep on trying to follow Him. The devil on the other hand would have us feel overcome by shame and guilt when we realise our failures in other people's eyes and especially in our own, for his way is one of **division, isolation and fear** that would prevent us from turning back to God.

## *False Gods*

In our present age, our minds, our behaviour, our lives and those of our children are being presented constantly with the images of false gods. Self improvement, self knowledge, making good at all costs, struggling for financial success, conforming with the popular image - all these can be false gods. Do we ever stop to ask where these images of false gods have come from or who provides the finance to project them?

We are being led to achieving at the expense of our neighbour and we can see that this selfishness, greed for power, wealth, position, and popularity leaves an open door for satan to entice us. He then accuses us of not keeping Jesus' command to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is perhaps an encouragement to remember that satan tried **three** times to entice Jesus, with the same tactics he is still using today, and that Jesus' replies therefore should form the basis of our lives. "**Man shall not live by bread alone**". "**You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve**" and "**You shall not tempt the Lord your God**" (Luke 4:1-13). It is important to note that in the last reply satan is reminded that God is his Lord with the implication that he will come under God's rule and be conquered. Note that at the end of verse 13 it states that satan departed until an opportune time.

We can never be sure when that time will be for us. It is so easy to become complacent and to work in our own strength and understanding, to go it alone. Just as the Israelites had to keep looking up to the bronze serpent held aloft that those who had been bitten by snakes should live, so too must we constantly look to Jesus' cross for the healing and protection which His blood alone can give. We know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that in His own preaching and teaching He used the scriptures. As we model ourselves on Him, we must learn to use the scriptures, to apply them to our own lives and lifestyles, and to use them as part of our spiritual attack as Jesus did.

## *Making The Stand*

So often we forget that we cannot make any stand for God's kingdom, to preach the Good News, to bring life and healing in Jesus' name or to continue to pray with expectant faith unless we turn to face the truth.

The Lord intends us to face the attacks of the enemy (Heb.10:32-39). To do this we need to put on the **whole** armour of God (Eph.6:10-20), and to note that our strength is in the Lord as we take our stand. As Paul describes the armour, the Christian soldier is already wearing the three basic parts of his uniform.

(1) **The Belt of Truth** which holds all the parts together, needs to be firm. Christians must be sure of what they are in Christ (Rom.8:1-4) to be able to withstand the doubts which satan, the father of lies, will use against us - satan has no power over us when our lives are under the authority of Jesus, and we are sure in the knowledge of His love for us. We must be able to reply as Paul did with certainty (Rom.8:31-39).

(2) **The Breastplate of Righteousness**, is God's righteousness, not ours. Our relationship with Him has been put right through faith in His Son (Isaiah 1:18), but unless our lives are lived out in accordance with His will we are vulnerable to satan's attacks, for faith and obedience go hand in hand (James 4:7-8).

(3) **The Boots of the Gospel**, are often referred to as sandals. However, the heavy sandals the Roman soldiers wore were more like the army boots of today, enabling them to stand firm on slippery ground and protecting them from injury. We too must stand firm for the Gospel. We must not compromise our standards. We must not stay in a comfortable church group situation refusing to change after praying for renewal. Renewal means change.

We must listen to what God is saying to us, for we are a pilgrim people. Who are we trying to please, God or man? (Gal. 1:10), We must be ready and mobile to go where the Lord leads us, to witness and serve. Enabled by the Holy Spirit we must "be Christ" to those He sends us.

The other three items are special battle gear.

(4) **The Shield of Faith**, of taking God's promises as true, of our faith in Him and not our own strength and abilities will enable us to withstand the "flaming darts", eg. our fears, doubts, worries and depressions. The best way to take up the shield is to praise and thank the Lord, to put on the mantle of praise (Isaiah 61:3) as soon as we wake up, before the devil can attack our minds and imaginations with negative feelings or confusion.

(5) **The Helmet of Salvation** protects our minds, for

the spiritual battle is largely one of the mind, in which Satan tries to make us feel discouraged, disillusioned and unworthy. We must not rush into battle without realising constantly that our salvation is through our acceptance of what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross, that our hope is in His resurrection promise, that God's promise is trustworthy and that our intellects have been willingly submitted to Jesus so that His Spirit can guide and inspire our thoughts according to His will.

(6) **The Sword of the Spirit** differs from the other parts of the equipment as they are all protective, but this is to attack. This sword needs to be kept sharp by regular study of the scriptures so that the word becomes part of our being, committed to memory and used in the name of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## *The Way Of Jesus*

Jesus' teaching of the life a disciple can expect (Matt.10:5-42) warns of many of the problems we can expect to face, but we are reassured of the Father's love in verses 26-33.

It is interesting to read Paul's positive approach to the problems of his day, many similar to our own, in his letter to the Colossians. Jesus said "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master". (Matt. 10:25), and Paul teaches "And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14).

As part of our preparation to serve the Lord, we need to remember that Jesus was a humble servant, living and dying a life of perfect and total love, that He made space to pray and listen to the Father, to study the scriptures and to have fellowship with the disciples. Life with the Lord is **positive, life-giving, bearing fruits** of hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control, bringing reconciliation with the Father, to ourselves and with one another. Every "yes" to God is another brick in the wall of God's Kingdom and makes the evil one retreat another step in the battle.

It is helpful to read many times Paul's letters to the young churches, especially Eph.3:14 - 6:20 and Col. 1:9 - 4:6 along with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount given at the start of His preaching ministry, Matt. chapters 5-7. To prepare us to be the salt of the earth which Jesus and Paul refer to, the following prayer of St John of the Cross may be helpful.

*Jesus, meek and humble of heart,  
Hear me.*

*From a love of being esteemed,  
Deliver me Jesus;*

*From the desire of being loved,  
From the desire of being sought after,*

*From the desire of being honoured,*

*From the desire of being praised,*

*From the desire of being preferred to others,*

*From the desire of being approved,*

*From the desire of being valued,  
Deliver me Jesus.*

*From the paralysis of unforgiven guilt,  
Liberate me dear Lord;*

*From the inner division and divided loyalty,*

*From fear of responsibility,*

*From a hidden sense of inferiority,*

*From a fear of failure,*

*From a pride that refuses grace,*

*From every root of bitterness,*

*From every centre but the Father,  
Liberate me dear Lord.*

*For the joy of knowing the Father and You,  
Train me, dear Master;*

*For growth towards your fulness,*

*For freedom to love others,*

*For the Father's wise and loving will,*

*For serenity in all that happens,*

*For faithfulness in your church,*

*For helping to build the Father's world,*

*For eternal blessedness,  
Train me, dear Master.*

*Desire to have pleasure in nothing,*

*Desire to possess nothing,*

*Desire to know nothing,*

*Desire to be nothing in order to have everything in  
Christ. Amen.*

**St. John of the Cross**