

Armed for the Battle

The Battle We Fight

Because the whole of the new dispensation constitutes the “last days,” there was a battle for the Christians to whom Paul wrote in Thessalonica, and there is today, and there will be until the end a battle for the young people of the church. In these latter days, the days grow darker, and the battle waxes ever hotter. That there was and is and will be a battle is made plain by the theme text (1 Thess. 5:1–8), which states in verse 8, “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” A breastplate and helmet are armor for *battle*.

We use an illustration taken from the fifth stanza of Psalter 71 to illustrate the battle: “Uplifted on a rock, above my foes around, amid the battle shock, my song shall still resound....” Let’s imagine there is a rock called “Faithfulness to God.” Every young person stands on that rock. The church stands on that rock. To stand on the rock called “Faithfulness to God” is victory. To fall off that rock—which would be “Unfaithfulness to God”—is defeat. Below the rock there are enemies who surround it. They are all the enemies of the church, armed with spears, darts, and arrows. The singular purpose of those soldiers in the army of Satan is not so much to kill us physically, though they will, but to knock you and me off the rock so that we are unfaithful to God.

In order to describe the battle in more detail, we can give longer names to that rock. The first is “Chastity is Faithfulness to God.” Sexual purity of heart and body is faithfulness to God. To stand on that rock is victory. To fall off is defeat. As the world becomes increasingly permissive toward sexual immorality, there are arrows of pressure and spears of temptations flying toward you young people as never before.

If you were the children of darkness, the majority of you would have committed fornication with another by now. Fornication is accepted in the public schools. The goal is not to stop it, but to make it physically safe. Moreover, most of you by now would have already considered the question, “Do I want to change my sexuality and become transgendered?” Exactly one year ago the state of California passed a law opening up all bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports teams of the public schools to the transgendered. Additionally, nominally Christian young people throughout the county and world are being taught that the homosexuality so vigorously supported by this world is legitimate and is acceptable to God. Synods and general assemblies of Christian denominations are doing today what they have never done in the history of the world: officially sanctioning the homosexuality of the Sodom of this world as permissive for young

people. Then there is pornography and all of its soul-destroying filth, to which young people have access as never before.

We are surrounded by an innumerable host of enemies with all of their devilish spears and arrows of sexual temptations and pressures hurled at us day after day. When you are dating and all alone, when you are in front of the screen and all alone, when you are amid all of the filthy talk at work or in the university, temptations are there to knock you off the rock called “Chastity is Faithfulness to God.”

Second, we could call that rock “Standing for the Truth of the Reformed Faith is Faithfulness to God.” To stand on that rock of faithfulness is to stand for the truth you have learned or will learn in the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* catechism class. The devil and all of his enemies desire your fall from that rock as they hurl spears at you.

As you continue in life, you will encounter professing Christians and Christian churches who are opposed to abortion, homosexuality, the encroachment of big government, the advances of Islam, and denials that there really is a Jesus. These Christians call fellow Christians and Christian churches to stand together and face all these threats. In the face of such calls, will you even mention “sovereign double predestination,” or “total depravity” or “the unbreakable bond of marriage?” Will we be willing to stand alone for these fundamental doctrines? Others will say, “Are you crazy? Don’t you see the magnitude of the battle? Stand with us! Why will you allow some impractical, abstract doctrines to separate us?” Or let’s suppose a cute young lady walks by one day, or a charming young man. You take notice. Will you give up much of what you learned in the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* catechism class in order to date and marry her/him, reassuring yourself, “Well she is a Christian. He does confess Jesus”? As we stand uplifted on that rock called, “Standing for the Truth of the Reformed Faith is Faithfulness to God,” the devil is determined to work our fall.

Third, we could call that rock, “Enduring Persecution for Jesus’ sake is Faithfulness to God.” The enemies around the rock have two ways to get you off the rock. One is by throwing spears to knock you off. The other is by throwing so many spears that an appeal is made to the traitorous foe within, the old man, who rises to power and through whom we pull out the white flag of surrender. “I give up! It hurts too much to stand for Jesus. Faithfulness to God is too costly. Let me come down and join you!”

Persecution can take the form of mockery, the loss of a job, starvation for refusing the mark of the beast, separation from family, beatings, imprisonment, or martyrdom. The pressures put upon you and me are only going to grow, with spears flying furiously from every direction as the devil is loosed and makes one last violent assault upon the church and her members.

The Armor We Wear

The only way to stand uplifted on that rock of Faithfulness to God, above your foes around, is to be *armed*. Listen to the apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:8: “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.” We need a breastplate and a helmet, two defensive pieces of armor we put on our person. The one is a coat of metal to protect the heart and the other a covering to protect the head.

Spiritually we need three graces: faith and love, which are associated with the breastplate, and hope, which is associated with the helmet. Faith, whereby we trust in God, is fittingly associated with the breastplate because faith is seated in the heart (cf. Rom. 10:10). Love, whereby we view God as precious and cleave to him, is fittingly associated with the breastplate because love is seated in the heart (cf. 1 Pet. 1:22). Hope, whereby we long with eager and confident expectation for the fullness of our salvation, is fittingly associated with the helmet because hope is seated in the thoughts of the mind (cf. Col. 3:1–2 where “Set your affection on” means “think on” or “set your mind on”).

Physically a breastplate and a helmet are inactive. But spiritually, faith—“I trust in God with all my heart,” and love—“I cleave to God with all my heart,” and hope—“I long for the fullness of the salvation of heaven that God promised to me,” are three vigorous spiritual activities. To be armed for the battle is to have the activities of faith and love and hope, which activities protect us from all the spears of our enemies.

We stand on the rock called, “Chastity is Faithfulness to God,” amid all the fiery darts of sexual temptations. When we are armed with the breastplate of faith—“I believe in God and his word, which teaches that rich reward and blessedness come by sexual purity,” and with the breastplate of love—“God gave me this body and this heart, and because I love him I will keep it pure,” and with the helmet of hope—“My heart is not set on the pleasures of this life, but I hope in the life that awaits me in heaven,” we stand. When young people stumble and fall from the rock of chastity and become unfaithful sexually, in heart or body, it is because they do not trust God, love God, and hope in God as they ought. Armed for the battle, we stand on the rock of faithfulness.

When armed with faith, love, and hope, we stand fast on the rock called “Standing for the Truth of the Reformed Faith is Faithfulness to God.” The reason some stumble on the rock and abandon the Reformed faith, even though they memorized word for word every answer in the *Essentials* book and took good notes in catechism class, is that they never really believed the truth, they never really loved the truth, and they never really made the promises of the truth their hope. Standing on the rock amid all the flying

arrows, the child of God stands secure, saying, “I believe the truth of the Reformed faith, love it with all my heart, and make its promises my hope!”

We stand on the rock called, “Enduring Persecution for Jesus’ sake is Faithfulness to God.” When armed with the breastplate of faith, we stand: “I *trust* my God. Even when I lose my job or my loved one or my possessions or my life, I trust my God. He will take care of me. For I believe ‘He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it!’” When armed with the breastplate of love—“Take everything, all my possessions, my family, my life; I will not deny Christ because I love him”—we stand. When armed with the helmet of hope—“I will not deny Christ because though I lose everything here below my hope is in heaven, and I will awake in righteousness”—we stand faithful to God.

The Savior We Need

Jesus Christ possesses the armor. It is his. Through his death and resurrection Jesus defeated in principle all of our enemies. At the cross Christ endured the fires of God’s wrath for our unfaithfulness, as we so often stumble on the rock of faithfulness. But in the fires of the cross he forged for you and me a breastplate and a helmet. And in the resurrection he arose from the depths of the foundry with two completed pieces of armor for us, the breastplate and the helmet, that is, faith, love, and hope. They are his. To be armed is to be armed with Christ.

Jesus Christ puts the armor on us or in us at the moment of regeneration. Then throughout our lives he calls that armor to conscious, vigorous activity, primarily through the preaching of the gospel. A main purpose of preaching is to quicken within us faith, love, and hope, so that we leave church saying, “I trust in my God as never before, love him as never before, and hope in him as never before.” How necessary for the battle, then, that young people become members of a true church institute and attend the preaching of the gospel where Christ arms his soldiers.

May Christ arm you for the battle. He will. Armed you will stand. Standing on that rock of faithfulness to God, adopt an unorthodox battle posture. Instead of looking down at the enemies, look up to the heavens, expecting the appearance of your hope, the Lord Jesus Christ who is coming to take vengeance on all of his and our enemies, and deliver us to the peace of heaven. He is coming. Coming soon. Armed for the battle we do stand.

