

The Armour of Light (Romans 13:12-14)

by Bernhard Kaiser

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Introduction: What's the problem?

When I was preparing this sermon, I looked through the titles of the other messages of this congress. Most of them are dealing with movements and views which are not compatible with the Holy Scriptures: apostasy and false doctrine in the church and the appalling state of our societies. The focus of these messages including my own has been apologetic. But then I asked myself: Is separation from the world and being different to it the only message of our congress? Does the Church live by separation? That surely cannot be, because the Scriptures clearly say that the Christian as well as the Church live by faith. So I asked myself: Where is the Gospel at the congress? Maybe you think, well, the Gospel is quite clear, everybody knows it, at least should everybody know it who participates at this congress. But I doubt whether this is true. I have often observed that so many protestant Christians are not aware of the grace in the Gospel. They would say: If you come to Christ, God forgives all your sins and the Holy Spirit renews your heart. You can get new life in Christ. But once born again, the Christian is called to obey the commandments of God and follow the admonitions of the New Testament, in order to make sure that his salvation is real. We do not distinguish between an order of retribution and an order of grace. We would locate grace at the point of conversion, but would consider being a Christian is something like a retributive order. Thus we would think: If I do not read the Bible, if I do not pray, if I do not struggle for a holy life, the Lord will reduce his blessing. In order be clear: Nothing is bad in Bible reading, praying and struggling for a holy life, but without noticing it, the devil has changed our minds so that we consider Christian life as a task which the Christian has to fulfil. We consider the Biblical admonitions like conditions to be fulfilled in order to merit God's blessings. We have lost faith, we are no longer living by faith, but by works.

The result is and will always be that we accuse ourselves for not having done enough, for not having been faithful enough, for not having paid attention enough to the requests of the Lord. This gnaws at our conscience, and we try to hide our bad conscience by raising the moral standards for ourselves and for others. But let me tell you: This is the way the devil deceives the Christians, not to walk by faith, but to live upon works, to feel satisfied by one's own achievements. He wants us to think: I am a good Christian, I am a faithful soldier of the Lord. Because I am such a good Christian, I expect that God will have mercy with me. Let me tell you frankly: This is nothing but disbelief. That's the way how natural man is thinking. He perceives his relationship towards God as a retributive order and he does not believe in the gospel of grace. This type of thought dishonours God. Such a Christian has not understood that not only conversion, but also Christian life is by faith alone. So please let me call your attention to the basis both of

our Christian faith and of our Christian warfare. Let me at first speak about God's work in Christ as the foundation of all what we are called to do. Let me deepen that in the second part of my message by showing the faithfulness of God as the particular reason for us to be faithful to him. In the third part of my message, I would like to speak about ourselves, about what we are and who we are. Finally, I will speak about the faithful soldier of Christ.

1. The true foundation: God's work in Christ

First of all, we must observe that the salvation of the world is not ours, but God's work in Christ. Christ has redeemed the world by his blood. He has reconciled us to God. It is most crucial to a Christian, who wants to serve the Lord, to make sure that he is saved by the grace of God. He should be sure that he is justified in the sacrifice of Christ. It is most important to a faithful soldier of Christ, to be certain concerning one's own salvation. If this is not clear, the enemy will continuously attack the Christian at this particular point. "Are you sure to be saved?" "Are you saved at all?" will be the questions by which the enemy will attack him. Mislead by a false understanding of regeneration, the Christian is tempted to look to himself, and he will discover so many acts of sin both within his heart as well as in his words and deeds. He would expect to find within himself a strong desire to love the Lord and to serve him, but he will surely find a strong propensity to evil – to gossip, to lie, to hate, to envy, to adultery and to avarice and greed. Then he will ask himself: "Am I really born again?" "Isn't my regeneration pure imagination? A fake? Am I lying to myself?" These questions are the result of a theological deviation. The deviation consists in separating word and Spirit, in separating faith and life. According to the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit comes by the Word, because the Word – the holy word of God which has been spoken by the Spirit through the mouth of the apostles and prophets. If we hear the word and understand it, if we believe it, we are born again, we have got new life. But if we separate word and Spirit, the word only is an outward voice and the Spirit becomes a mystic power. Then we expect we expect the Holy Spirit to create in us inner impulses to love and to serve God, but we have set aside faith or have ceased to believe. We try to get certainty from what we can observe within ourselves. But we cannot build the certainty of our salvation upon something, which we consider to be in us, but which is not there. The Bible clearly teaches that our salvation is in Christ. Consequently we are bound to look at him. In him, we can see a merciful God, who says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:21); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:31); "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37). "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1John 2:2). Do not consider your prayer to Christ to be the condition, which you are going to fulfil and that God grants his salvation because you have prayed. Consider your prayer to be an expression of your faith, by which you trust that the Lord in his loving-kindness is going to forgive your sins. Do not consider your prayer or any other expression of faith to be the evidence of being elected and predestined to eternal life, but consider that you have been elected and predestined in Christ. So your predestination does not become visible in your piety, but in Christ. You know to be predestined by looking unto Christ and the general promises of salvation, which are valid for you, too. Certainty of salvation stems from Christ alone and is given to us by the promises of the Gospel.

But not only that. Christ has also overcome the powers of evil. In Christ, God has "spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over

them in it“ (Col 2:15). He has “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:20-23). This is not only the basis of our salvation, but also the basis of the struggle, the Christian has to face. I want to say by that: We could not win anything if Christ had not won the great war against Satan and his hosts. We cannot but participate in the victory, which Christ has already gained.

As we have seen, salvation is by faith. But also Christian warfare is by faith. It means that God himself is still performing the struggle which is necessary for building up his church and against the powers of evil. He said to Moses: “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Ex 14:14), or through Zechariah: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zec 4:6). The power of the Holy Spirit is within our hands, because the Spirit is given by the word of the Scriptures. The Scriptures, being the holy word of God, are as well the powerful word, by which Christ’s victory is put in our midst. By his word, God is building his church. By his word, he overcomes the unbeliever; he converts him and leads him to faith according to his elective decree.

That’s what we have got to learn as servants of the Lord, who want to be faithful soldiers of Christ: We are called to trust that the Lord is at work. This does not mean that we are free to be lazy or to do nothing. No, we are called to work in what the Lord puts into our hands, diligently, soberly and carefully. But we are called at the same time to believe, that the work is not ours, but the Lord’s. We are looking away from ourselves, how we feel, whether our plans or desires are fulfilled or how we are perceived but other people. We simply look at the Lord and try to make sure that both what we are saying and the way how we are saying it are according to his word.

That’s the Gospel for the soldiers of Christ. If we do not start with the Gospel, all our efforts to be faithful soldiers of Christ will fail and thus will be without any value. They will be nothing else but a commitment to particular ideals. Ideals are famous because nobody is able to reach them. They remain an ideal, but are not real. Such is the ideal of the faithful soldier of Christ.

2. The fidelity of the Lord

We have just seen that God has saved us in Christ and that salvation is distributed and applied through the word. We have got salvation by God’s promise. Yet we do not see our salvation. Thus it is most crucial to be aware of the trustworthiness of God. So, let me now in a second step speak about the trustworthiness of God’s word, because that is the marrow of what is to be said about the fidelity of the Lord.

God’s faithfulness is related to his word. That’s why his word is holy. It is true because it is covered by reality, both by the unseen reality of God, his love and mercy, his wrath and his judgement, and by the visible reality, that is the history by which he has revealed himself and in particular by his son Jesus Christ, who has become flesh and who thus has died for our sins as a vicarious sacrifice. The righteousness of God is not just an unseen attitude, but is a reality, a matter of fact in the cross of Christ.

The faithfulness of God can clearly be seen by his revelation. At first, it becomes visible therein, that he is saying the truth about things created. That he in the beginning has created heaven and earth fits to a vast number of observations which can be made by science. Science by now is not able to prove that the world and particular life have developed out of its own. It is far more reasonable that a mighty and wise God has made all things. God's faithfulness can also be seen therein that he, by his holy word, describes the world as it is, and that he is speaking about man in way which perfectly fits to what we can observe in ourselves and others. Time and space are lacking to get into details at this point.

God has revealed himself to be a faithful God. We can observe that God very often speaks about his fidelity. This becomes clear particularly by the promises he has made and their fulfilment, as far as his promises were to be fulfilled at a time determined by God. God has often made particular promises to people beforehand and has fulfilled his promises later, sometimes many centuries later. Let me give you some examples.

It is most significant in the history of the people of Israel, that God has promised to Abraham, (a) to be the God of him and his descendants, (b) to give him a numerous offspring and (c) to give the land of Canaan as a possession to his people and (d) that all people on earth should be blessed through Abraham and his descendants. Other promises could be adduced but I will limit myself to these.

Ad (a): We read: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen 17:7). This promise aims to the fidelity of God. He remains faithful to his promises, although his people does not. It is such that Paul says: "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2Tim 2:13). This means: God remains faithful to the promises he has given to his people, be it the people of Israel in the Old Covenant or be it the Christian Church in the New Covenant. This does not mean that every individual of his people will be saved. But every individual of his people has got the right to call upon him, to seek salvation in him. His people of the Old Covenant were the ethnic people of Israel. But we can already see that heathen individuals participated in that covenant and its promises like Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, Ruth of the people of Moab, Naaman, the Syrian officer, and others. The sign of that covenant was circumcision. In the New Covenant, the world wide Christian Church is the people of God, and the signs of this covenant are baptism and the Lord's supper. By these signs as well as by the word, which has been written and which is to be preached, we can hear and see that God wants to be our God. The Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, who has sent his son to redeem us, this same God wants to be our God. The fact that we are calling upon the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is part of the fulfilment of the promise given to Abraham some 4000 years ago.

Ad (b): We read: "I will multiply thee exceedingly ... and thou shalt be a father of many nations" (Gen 17:2.4). The fulfilment of this promise began when Isaac was born and finally the people of Israel came to be. But apparently, the promise looks further so that "many nations" should become Abraham's seed. Paul teaches us that the real seed of Abraham are the believers, that is, those who believe into the promises of God just as Abraham did. That is the way how in the course of church history many people became participants in the promises given to Abraham. Such is the fulfilment of that promise, and as long as all over the world people come to Christ, believe in him, get baptized and are made members of his people, this promise is still being fulfilled, until Christ will

come back and the billions of people will gather before him and the new earth will be given to them.

Ad (c): We read: "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen 17:8). This is a very limited promise and it has been fulfilled already within the Old Covenant. It is well known that the people of Israel occupied the promised land under Joshua, and we can read in Joshua 21:43-45 "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." This, too, is an important proof of the fidelity of the Lord. It shows that God does not only give promises with respect to the world to come. The fact that he has fulfilled and still does fulfil what he has promised with respect to the present world is a strong motive to trust him.

Ad (d): We read: "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3). The promise of blessing aims to Christ, as Paul shows in Galatians 3:8-9: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." By this example, we can see that God announced his purpose to save the world already to Abraham, and this same purpose is fulfilled by the preaching of the Apostles to heathen people and throughout church history until the second coming of Christ. By promising the great blessing, God shows that he wants to save people from condemnation.

We could adduce many other promises of the Old Testament, in particular the great number of promises concerning the Messiah, his person and his work, which have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is a characteristic feature of God's revelation, as it is shown by the holy Scriptures, that God has used history to give great promises and to fulfil them in due time, within history. Thus we can see that God really takes his word seriously. He has shown himself to be a faithful God and he will also fulfil the promises he has made for us in the Gospel.

All this is a great incentive to trust in him. We have heard many admonitions to be faithful to the Lord. But our faithfulness to him would be sheer idealism, if it did not flow from this very special reality, the faithfulness of the Lord himself. Because he is faithful, we can have faith in him. Our faith rests upon the truth and the faithfulness of God.

3. Who are we? The works of darkness

In order to become faithful soldiers of the Lord and if we want to take up the armour of light, we must also be aware of what we are. As a matter of fact, our salvation is questioned both by our own experience and by the discrimination from the unbelieving world. Our own experience is that we day by day must observe our own sinfulness. Although we may not kill nor commit adultery or theft, we must recognize and confess our proneness towards sin. Disbelief, little faith, hatred, envy, covetousness, greediness and similar things are not to be seen by others. But besides being spiritual minded, these evil

things are present in our hearts as well. Sometimes we may become overwhelmed by sheer desperation because little faith and hopelessness are filling our hearts instead of faith and hope. That's the reality in which we are living. We have many examples of darkness, also within our own life.

Darkness is particularly related to lie. A lie is normally used to cover sin, either sin which has already been committed or sin, which is going to be committed. For example, Walter Ulbricht, the famous president of the East-German socialist party in the former GDR said in July 1961: "Nobody is making plans to build a wall." But few weeks later, the Berlin wall was built. Obviously, Ulbricht had uttered a lie. By the lie, a man maintains the façade of correctness, of reliability and honesty. He wants other people to think and to behave according to something, which is not true, to trust in something imaginary. But in itself, a lie is the entire opposite. It is sin, and very often by this sin another sin is covered. By that you can see how the enemy is trying to catch a man in a web of sin. One sin bears as its fruit another sin. Criminal films show that a murder is often motivated by the interest to hide another sin.

Sad to say, but this is very often the situation of a Christian, too. He does sin, but wants to hide his sin. He does not confess it, but he denies it. John the Evangelist says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1John 1:8). Come out of your darkness. I dare to say that just in this place, at this conference, because I am convinced that many of us are hiding something. It may be sexual impurity – I am thinking of a minister who has abused the confidence of another family to commit adultery, let's say with the wife of one of the elders of his church. It may be theft – I am thinking of an elder who is the treasurer of a local church and who has taken money which has been given to the church, and has put it into his own purse. It may be drunkenness – I am thinking of a person with a weak character, who is inclined to flee from reality into inebriation, who enjoys forgetting unsolved problems. Many other sins may be done, but these are the most common ones: fornication, theft and drunkenness.

In order to become a faithful soldier, it is most necessary to be aware of our own weakness. Who are we? We are fallen creatures, men and women in whose heart is the program of sin, the program of rebellion against the Lord. In particular, it is the program of disbelief, the tendency to dismay, to give up, the tendency to follow temptation, the love of pleasure, material wealth and acceptance by the society. It is most important to be aware of that sad reality within ourselves. Whoever wants to live in the light of the Gospel will have to be honest to himself, to God and to men concerning this sad reality.

In order to bring us to the light, God does not deal with us in terms of one or more ideals. He does not put before us unattainable aims. His commandments are not like an ideal which he sets before us and says: "If you want to be a good Christian, try to do that!" He is dealing with us by his law in order to show us that we are sinners. He does not only say "Thou shalt not commit adultery", but also, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife". He not only says: "Thou shalt not kill", but also "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." By these words, we can see that sin does not start only with an outward deed. It starts already in thoughts and words. So not only the feeling of envy or hatred is sin, but also the lack of love. Nobody of us can claim that he is sinless in present life.

But above all, God has revealed the Gospel. By the Gospel, he tells us that we have been reconciled with him in Jesus Christ. By the Gospel, he promises the forgiveness of our sins. He shows his mercy, his lovingkindness, by which he covers our unrighteous-

ness with the righteousness of Christ. He does not take in account our sins, but counts the righteousness of Christ to be ours. The Bible shows that in a beautiful picture, which we find in the book of Isaiah: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Is 61:10). God himself gives us this beautiful garment of righteousness. We put it on by faith. By that faith, we embrace Christ, and God counts that faith for righteousness, as he has always done, both in the Old and the New Testament. Speaking about the spiritual armour, Paul in Ephesians 6 considers faith to be the shield, by which we may quench the fiery darts of Satan. The righteousness of Christ, received by faith, is compared with the breastplate and salvation in general with the helmet. So we can see that salvation itself is the best defensive weapon in the struggle the Christian is called to. We should be precise: This implies to be certain about one’s salvation, whereby that certainty stems from the faithfulness of God and the trustworthiness of his holy word.

4. Christian warfare: The armour of light

“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” – that is Paul’s admonition in this context. What does that mean? What shall we do in order to put on the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul has in mind that Christ is to put on like a coat. This is quite similar to what I have just been speaking about. The picture shows that in us there is much shabby and much unhandsome to be covered. So, if we are aware of our sinfulness, we will rejoice in being clothed by Christ. Of course we have not got Christ like a coat hanging in a closet. But: He is our representative, and by believing in him, we put him on like a coat. This should be done every day and at any time. Let us be conscious that Christ is our saviour, our righteousness and our representative, in whom we are living before God.

Having become at one with God in considering sin to be sin, we will do what Paul calls us to do: “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in gluttony and drunkenness, not in fornication and in a vicious life, not in quarrelling and envying.” That is: We will put off the open practice of sin. That means that we are continuously at war with our selfish lusts and are called, not to follow their demand. They are there and up to a lawful and decent extent we will enjoy eating and drinking, sexuality, wealth and good pleasures. But there is also a limit, which is trespassed if we are addicted to our lusts, if we do not dominate them, but if they dominate us. Paul says: “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” Let me give an example: The Bible has no problem to praise the wine and to enjoy drinking it (Ps 104:15), but more often it warns from the abuse of wine and says: “be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). So the Christian is called to be vigilant concerning himself.

In Romans 6, Paul exposes that the Christian has died in Christ’s death and been buried in his grave. He shows that this is present to the Christian by faith, as he says: “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). Then he also says: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). If you know that you are saved, justified and sanctified in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, you consequently will give yourself to the Lord: Your members – that is your tongue, your hands, your feet, your sexuality, your stomach – and whatever you are and whatever you have got. You will live from the freedom and the goods promised by the Gospel and will finance your Christian lifestyle by these goods. Then

your lifestyle will be light, not darkness. People can look at it and can see a Christian living by faith.

On the other hand, the Christian is called to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). This too is a purpose the Christian is called to pursue.

In Paul’s description of the spiritual armour in Ephesians 6, the word is the only offensive weapon. This must be underscored. It means that the Christian is called to preach the word of God in public or communicate it in private in a way, by which can be seen that what he is saying is in conformity with Scripture. He does that because God himself is working through his word. Because this word has been breathed or spoken by the Holy Spirit, the word itself is powerful enough to convert a person, to convince him of his sins and to lead him to confess his sins. It is much more powerful to create faith. So by the Holy Scripture the Christian has got a powerful weapon.

This means negatively that he does not try to manipulate his hearers, be it by psychological means or by mixing up the word of God with human wisdom or by corresponding to the expectations of his hearers by preaching a hearer centred message. He will also resist from coercion. He will have to tolerate that by far not everybody who hears the word of God will get converted and obedient to the Gospel. He will accept that people may become hostile to him because of what he is preaching. Nevertheless, he will not use undue polemics, make fun of someone or anticipate the judgement of God over his enemies. He will simply say what the Scriptures are saying. I want to say by these words that also the way how we contend for the word of God must be governed by the word as well as by faith in God.

The Christian soldier should not engage in arguments. Very often, such arguments are nothing else but bossiness. Quarrelling, strife for power and influence are not the means, by which a Christian is called to contend for Christian faith. They are much more a sad theatre play to be watched by the unbelieving world. Where people oppose to the word of God, the Christian, after having said what he has to say, will get away.

Conclusion

In order to be a faithful soldier of Christ, it is most important to know the basis, on which we belong to the Lord and the circumstances under which we serve him. I have spoken about God’s work in Christ and the fidelity of God with respect to the promises he has given in the Gospel. I have also spoken about our own sinful nature, which in itself is a challenge for the Christian to render good service to the Lord. Let us be aware of the fact that we, as we are by nature, are not apt for the service of the Lord. That’s why it is better to consider oneself to be weak and thus be cautious not to play games with sin. We are called to look elsewhere to get the strength for authentic Christian warfare. Paul says: „Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph 6:10). The Lord himself is the great light, which God has sent into this world. To put on the armour of light means to know him, to trust in him and to expect him to do his work by his holy word. So let us look at the Lord, to him, who was crucified for our sins and risen for our justification; to him, to whom all power in heaven and on earth is given. Let us trust in him, let us wait until he does what he has foreordained to do. Let us follow him.