



The Good Fight of Faith

A sermon preached by George Müller

2 Timothy iv, 7, 8.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy in the previous verse: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." He, as it were, committed the matter into the hands of Timothy, that he might do the utmost to prove a successor in labour and service, saying, For as for me, I am just on the point of being made a sacrifice for the Gospel's sake. I am ready to be sacrificed, and the time of my departure is at hand. And in making this statement there is as it were a glance at the past life, and the judgment regarding it is, "I have fought a good fight," rather, "the good fight." Fighting in the games, running in a race, are the figures here. But this fighting and running implies life. Keeping the faith implies that we have faith; naturally, this is the reverse. Naturally, we are dead in trespasses and sins, we have no spiritual life, and therefore there is no such thing as fighting against the devil, our own evil tendencies, the habits and customs of the world; but the worst of all is, we do not know it. We have life with regard to the body, life with regard to the mind. Having life as to the mind, we can think; having life as to the body, we can use our right or left arm, we can move from one place to another; but spiritually we are dead in trespasses and sins. And so it is entirely impossible to carry on a spiritual conflict. Every one needs to be quickened spiritually, to be made alive spiritually, to be born again spiritually; this is what we all need. And therefore, before we meditate any further upon this, we must ask ourselves, - Am I spiritually alive? or am I dead in trespasses and sins? Now there are hundreds here who by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ have obtained spiritual life, who are born again, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But there are many here who are as yet dead in trespasses and sins, and who cannot possibly fight the good fight. And what is my word to them? What it has been many times before. Own before God that you are sinners. Condemn yourselves before God as sinners; and should you not see that you are sinners, then read carefully the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, and if you honestly desire to see what you are, God will show it to you. You will see then that you are sinners; and you will find in these three chapters what God in His wondrous grace has done for these guilty sinners, in that he gave His only begotten Son, bruised Him, laid on Him the iniquity of us all, that all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved, and not only be saved, but through this very faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are begotten again. It is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that this new birth is brought about according to Galatians iii. 26: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" also, I John v. 1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

Now is this the case with regard to all of us? Have we all seen that we are sinners, and all put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls? If so, then we have spiritual life, but only in this way is it that we can have spiritual life. No religious ceremonies and observances will make us alive, not even reading the Bible itself will make us alive; though it is right and proper that we should read it, but that in itself will not make us alive.

Now, when we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then begins the race. The apostle Paul, looking back on many years, came to this conclusion: - By the grace of God I have fought the good fight. After this, beloved in Christ, we have to seek; and we have not to say to ourselves, But here is an apostle, and no doubt he fought a good fight; but as for me, poor weak sinner as I am, in much conflict, exposed to many trials, having a long family dependent upon me, how can it be said of me, "I have fought a good fight"? But if we reason so, we shall reason to the dishonour of God. We have to keep before us that the Lord Jesus Christ is the living Lord, and we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us; and it is impossible to say to what amount we may be helped by looking to Him and trusting in Him. Paul was able to say it, not because he was an apostle, not because he had no trials, for he had an abundance of trials and difficulties; not because he had not an evil nature, but it was because this apostle was deeply conscious of his weakness and helplessness, and was looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. And if ye are enabled, like this man of God, to look to the Lord Jesus, owning our helplessness and nothingness, we shall find how willing He is to help us and strengthen us. But means are to be used. Day by day we are to seek to be nourished through the word of God. Persons who have to work with their bodies cannot go on for any length of time unless they take nourishing food at stated times. The child of God has to see to it that again and again and again he comes to this blessed book for nourishment for the inner man. It is not the will of the Lord that we should be twenty-four hours reading that blessed book on our knees. The children of God have work or service appointed them, and by this they are kept in a healthy state. I remember a godly brother said to me, forty-two years ago, - Get nourishment for your soul from God's word, and then work it out." This is deeply important. We should seek to read the word of God to be nourished and strengthened for our service. We must serve God with the strength He has given us - the mother in her family, the head of the family in his business, doing all for the glory of God, looking to Him for help and blessing. And so everyone of us, in our various positions, should seek to labour for God with the strength which He has, given to us. And if anyone were habitually to neglect reading the word of God, let such a one be sure of this, - he will very soon find out how little he is able to withstand the devil and the corruptions within. Now, then, let us seek particularly to remember this; for I judge that though prayer is of the utmost moment, yet still this is as deeply, or more deeply important than prayer itself: for when we pray to God, we speak to God; but when we read the Scriptures, God speaks to us, and this is what we so much need. In addition to this we have to expect answers to our prayers; we have to expect that the next time temptation comes, we shall not be conquered, but that God will help us by His Spirit's might in the inner man. And this one point especially is to be noticed: when we have found anything in Scripture that we seek honestly to carry it out. Here you see is a special danger. We may clearly and distinctly see what is the will of God; but we may say, But this is very trying; this is very much against my natural inclinations. If we say, I don't like this, then we shall never do the things which are according to the mind of God. But let us say to ourselves, Oh what wondrous love God has shown to me in giving His Son to die for me. What can I do for Him? Though it is but little, let me seek to do that little. To the Cross of Christ we have to look continually; we have to admire the love of God in giving His Son, and to admire the love of God in sending His Spirit into our hearts, and by the memory of it we shall be strengthened to go forth against the powers of darkness, And thus, not only beginning, but going on week after week, month after month, year after year, it would be true of you and me also at the last, "I have fought the good fight." Tens of thousands of the true children of God have passed away, of whom it was true that they had fought the good fight. Why should it not be true of you and me, beloved in Christ? And oh! if it were before us, - an eternity of

blessedness, the joy, the crown awaits us for eternity, the rivers of His pleasure, to see the King in His beauty, to spend a happy eternity in the presence of Jesus.

The apostle Paul adds further, "I have finished my course." This refers to the practice in games of running, and he applies what they all knew to his spiritual course. Thus, as the people of the world underwent great hardships and difficulties in order that they might have the prize and the crown, which was nothing more in many instances than a wreath of parsley leaves, and to be admired as the winners; so the apostle ran in a race, and with all steadfastness, and with all prayerfulness, and keeping under his body, and at the last he finished his course. Now, beloved in Christ, let it be present to us that all of us have our course, our race to run. Our service is not all the same. We have different work, different labour; God himself places us in our position, He knows our difficulties, our trials, our natural tendencies. He appoints our work. The blessed Jesus is ready to do for us individually what He did for that man of God, Paul, when he said, - "At my first answer no man stood with me; nevertheless the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." So, whatever the difficulties, whatever the trials, we may reckon on that blessed One. So then, from this evening and henceforth let us come to this holy, godly purpose, - By the help of God I will with renewed earnestness seek to set out in the race. Oh! let us honour the Lord by looking to Him for strength, expecting great things at His hands. "I have finished my course." John the Baptist finished his course; David finished his course; Paul finished his course; and many others; and why not you and I? Why should not we run successfully to the honour and glory of God? The temptation is lest we flag, lest we grow weary. Ah! but the angels are looking on, and the devils are looking on, and the eyes of the world are looking on; therefore, beloved in Christ, let it be our prayerful, earnest desire, as it was the desire of this man of God, to finish our course. Let us aim after the grace of apostles, though we cannot hold the office of apostles. "I have kept the faith." This at first sight might appear as if the apostle Paul ascribed to himself a great deal. But there was no boasting in this man of God regarding it. We know full well, again and again, what he says of himself, - Not worthy to be called a child of God. This was the lowly mind of this man of God. This might be true of us. For while on the one hand we can do nothing in our own strength, yet if we use the appointed means it will be true of us. One especial point is to maintain a good conscience else we are in danger of making shipwreck of faith. The conscience being defiled, we become spiritually weak. Whenever we fall into anything contrary to the will of God, we should confess it, and have recourse to the blood of Christ, and not go on in it, lest the good conscience be defiled. Now this man of God could say, "Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." This he could say when he stood before King Agrippa; and in reading the life of this blessed man of God, we find that though he was a poor sinner, yet he exercised himself in this to keep a good conscience before God. Let us aim after it, beloved in Christ. What is implied in it? I have been kept hanging upon Christ, trusting in Christ, for the salvation of my soul. I am a poor miserable sinner, but I look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the ground of my acceptance before God. I am a child of God, an heir of God, and I shall share the glory at the last.

And now the result of running the race, fighting the fight, keeping the faith: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing." Remarkable word this, "Crown of righteousness laid up for me." It is as it were in God's keeping. God is taking care of it; He would under no circumstances lose it. And thus regarding us, it awaits us. Before the universe to be owned as one

worthy of the crown; before the universe, when the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, would this man of God have this crown awarded to him.

And so will it be to those who love the prospect of His appearing. Not to such a one as the apostle only, or Peter, or Stephen, but unto all those who love His appearing. Now we have to ask ourselves, How is it with my heart, with regard to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I wish Him to come? Do I long to see Him? or do I not care about Him? If we are in our sins we cannot possibly wish to see such a person as the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do not love Him, if they were honestly to tell out their minds, would say, "I wish I were not under the necessity of meeting Him at all. But all true honest-hearted believers, though they may not be free from sins, yet they love the very thought of being at last with Jesus, of being free from sin like Jesus, and therefore the prospect is a precious one to their souls. Now all those who love the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, will just as much have the crown of righteousness as the apostle Paul. This is the prospect we have. The day is coming for the manifestation of the sons of God. The Lord Jesus will point out this one and that one, and say, - This is my disciple. Will this be true of all of us? Shall we all here present be owned by the Lord Jesus, and receive the crown of righteousness? Suppose the coming of the Lord Jesus were now to take place, in what state would it find us? - prepared or unprepared? Now everyone who is unprepared has to say to himself or herself, I do not love to be with Jesus Christ; this thereby proves the heart is not right. Any who love Jesus, wish to be with Jesus. This was not the case once with the apostle, yet see how great the change has been. Now, what God did for this great sinner, He is willing to do for every unconverted sinner here. Only believe God's gospel; this is the great remedy.



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