

J. C. Ryle Tracts

Some of these rare, short "Helmingham Series" tracts, not published since the 19th Century, have come into my possession, and I offer you these three exactly word for word as they were first published about the middle of the last century, while J. C. Ryle was a Rector at Helmingham, Suffolk.

THE GREAT BATTLE.

READER,

All men ought to love peace. War is an immense evil, though it is a necessary evil sometimes. Battles are bloody and distressing events, though sometimes nations cannot maintain their rights without them. But all men ought to love peace. All ought to pray for a quiet life.

All this is very true, and yet there is one war which it is a positive duty to carry on; there is one battle which we ought to be always fighting. The battle I speak of is the battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. With these enemies we never ought to be at peace; from this warfare no man ought ever to seek to be discharged, while he is alive.

Reader, give me your attention for a few minutes, and I will tell you something about *the great battle*.

Every professing Christian is the soldier of Christ. He is bound by his baptism to fight Christ's battle against sin, the world, and the devil. The man that does not do this, breaks his vow: he is a spiritual defaulter; he does not fulfil the engagement made for him. The man that does not do this, is practically renouncing his Christianity. The very fact that he belongs to a Church, attends a Christian place of worship, and calls himself a Christian, is a public declaration that he desires to be reckoned a soldier of Jesus Christ.

Armour is provided for the professing Christian, if he will only use it. "Take unto you," says Paul to the Ephesians, "the whole armour of God." "Stand, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness." "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." "Above all, take the shield of faith" (Ephes. vi. 13-17). And not least, the professing Christian has the best of leaders, —Jesus the Captain of salvation, through whom he may be more than conqueror; the best of provisions,—the bread and water of life; and the best of pay promised to him,—an eternal weight of glory.

All these are ancient things. I will not be drawn off to dwell on them now.

The one point I want to impress on your soul just now is this,—that if you want to be saved, you must not only be a soldier, but a *victorious* soldier. You must not only profess to fight on Christ's side against sin, the world, and the devil, but you must actually fight and *overcome*.

Now this is one grand distinguishing mark of true Christians. Other men perhaps like to be numbered in the ranks of Christ's army; other men may have lazy wishes, and languid desires after the crown of glory: but it is the true Christian alone who

does the work of a soldier. He alone fairly meets the enemies of his soul, really fights with them, and in that fight overcomes them.

Reader, one great lesson I wish you to learn this day is this,—that if you would prove you are born again and going to heaven, you must be a victorious soldier of Christ. If you would make it clear that you have any title to Christ's precious promises, you must fight the good fight in Christ's cause, and in that fight you must conquer.

Victory is the only satisfactory evidence that you have a saving religion. You like good sermons, perhaps; you respect the Bible, and read it occasionally; you say your prayers night and morning; you have family prayers, and give to religious societies. I thank God for this: it is all very good. But how goes the battle? How does the great conflict go on all this time? Are you overcoming the love of the world and the fear of man? Are you overcoming the passions, tempers, and lusts of your own heart? Are you resisting the devil, and making him flee from you? How is it in this matter? My dear brother or sister, you must either rule or serve sin, and the devil, and the world. There is no middle course. You must either conquer or be lost.

I know well it is a hard battle that you have to fight, and I want you to know it too. You must fight the good fight of faith, and endure hardships, if you would lay hold of eternal life; you must make up your mind to a daily struggle, if you would reach heaven. There may be short roads to heaven invented by man; but ancient Christianity,—the good old way,—is the way of the cross: the way of conflict. Sin, the world, and the devil must be actually mortified, resisted, and overcome.

This is the road that saints of old have trodden in, and left their record on high.

When Moses refused the pleasures of sin in Egypt, and chose affliction with the people of God,—this was overcoming: he overcame the *love of pleasure*.

When Micaiah refused to prophesy smooth things to king Ahab, though he knew he would be persecuted if he spoke the truth,—this was overcoming: he overcame the *love of ease*.

When Daniel refused to give up praying, though he knew the den of lions was prepared for him,—this was overcoming: he overcame the *fear of death*.

When Matthew rose from the receipt of custom at our Lord's bidding, left all and followed Him,—this was overcoming: he overcame the *love of money*.

When Peter and John stood up boldly before the Council and said, "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard"—this was overcoming: they overcame the *fear of man*.

When Saul the Pharisee gave up all his prospects of preferment among the Jews, and preached that Jesus whom he had once persecuted,—this was overcoming: he overcame the *love of man's praise*.

Reader, the same kind of thing which these men did you must also do, if you would be saved. They were men of like passions with yourself, and yet they overcame: they had as many trials as any you can possibly have, and yet they overcame. They fought, they wrestled, they struggled: you must do the same.

What was the secret of their victory? —their faith. They believed on Jesus, and believing were made strong. They believed on Jesus, and believing were held up.

In all their battles they kept their eyes on Jesus, and He never left them or forsook them. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of His testimony, and so may you.

Reader, I set these truths before you: I ask you to lay them to heart. Resolve, by the grace of God, to be an OVERCOMING Christian.

I do fear much for many professing Christians: I see no sign of fighting in them, much less of victory; they never strike one stroke on the side of Christ. They are at peace with His enemies: they have no quarrel with sin. Reader, I warn you this is not Christianity: this is not the way to heaven.

Men and women who hear the Gospel regularly, I often fear much for you. I fear lest you become so familiar with the sounds of its doctrines, that insensibly you become dead to its power. I fear lest your religion should sink down into a little vague talk about your own weakness and corruption, and a few sentimental expressions about Christ, while real practical fighting on Christ's side is altogether neglected. Oh, beware of this state of mind! "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only." No victory,—no crown! Fight and overcome!

Young men and women, and especially those who have been brought up in religious families, I fear much for you. I fear lest you get a habit of giving way to every temptation. I fear lest you be afraid of saying "No!" to the world and the devil,—and when sinners entice you, think it least trouble to consent. Beware, I do beseech you, of giving way. Every concession will make you weaker. Go into the world resolved to fight Christ's battle,—and fight your way on.

Believers in the Lord Jesus, of every Church and rank in life, I feel much for you. I know your course is hard: I know it is a sore battle you have to fight; I know you are often tempted to say, "It is of no use, and to lay down your arms altogether."

Cheer up, dear brethren and sisters: take comfort, I entreat you; look at the bright side of your position. Be encouraged to fight on: the time is short, the Lord is at hand, the night is far spent. Millions as weak as you have fought the same fight; not one of all those millions has been finally led captive by Satan. Mighty are your enemies,—but the Captain of your salvation is mightier still: His arm, His grace, and His Spirit shall hold you up. Cheer up: be not cast down.

What though you lose a battle or two? You shall not lose all. What though you faint sometimes? You shall not be quite cast down. What though you fall seven times? You shall not be destroyed. Watch against sin, and sin shall not have dominion over you. Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you. Come out boldly from the world and the world shall be obliged to let you go. You shall find yourselves in the end more than conquerors: you shall overcome.

Reader, let me draw from the whole subject a few words of application, and then I have done.

For one thing, let *me warn all formalists and self-righteous people to take heed that they are not deceived*. You fancy you will go to heaven because you go regularly to church; you indulge an expectation of eternal life, because you are always at the Lord's table, and are never missing in your pew. But where is your repentance? Where is your faith? Where are your evidences of a new heart? Where is the work of the Spirit? Where are the proofs that you are fighting the

great battle? Oh, formal Christian, consider these questions! Tremble: tremble, and repent.

For another thing, *let me warn all careless members of Churches to beware lest they trifle their souls into hell.* You live on year after year as if there was no battle to be fought with sin, the world, and the devil; you pass through life a smiling, laughing, gentleman-like or ladylike person, and behave as if there was no devil, no heaven, and no hell. Oh, careless Churchman, or careless Dissenter, careless Episcopalian, careless Presbyterian, careless Independent, careless Baptist, awake and see eternal realities in their true light! Awake, and put on the armour of God! Awake, and fight hard for life! Tremble: tremble, and repent.

Reader, the great battle must be fought by all who want to be saved. And more than this, *it must be won.*
