

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Arm Yourselves

1 Peter 4:1-6

4:1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

4:2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

4:3 For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

4:4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

4:5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

4:6 For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

1. New Testament Language

Even the Roman Empire concurred the world by military force; they could not renew the Greek culture. Therefore, Greek became the common language in the Roman Empire. The Greek used in the Empire is not the same old Greek that Homer wrote “the Illiad” or “the Odyssey” or the academic Greek that Plato wrote philosophy books. It was called “Koine Greek” that the ordinary people used in their life.

The New Testament was written in “Koine Greek”, because the authors wanted to introduce Jesus Christ in a language that everyone could understand. Jesus grew in Nazareth of Galilee and his first disciples were from Galilee, the border city with foreign countries. That is why people said, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46, John 7:42 and 52, Acts 2:7) and looked down on the people in Galilee. But because people in Galilee interacted with foreigners on a regular basis, they were able to speak Greek, and because of that, they can talk about Jesus Christ to many people. This is a reason why Jesus started outreach in Galilee and trained his disciples.

Since the “Koine Greek” of the New Testament was actually used in commercial trade, the New Testament vividly described the life of ordinary people and the truth of faith was explained as a parable taken from daily life. For example, as Romans 6:23 says “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”, it was written as the comparison between punishment we have to accept as the results of sins vs. something we obtain through faith, and they explained as “salary” and “bonus” in easy terms. Romans 6:11 says “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” The word “consider” is “calculate” or “examine after calculation” in financial Greek terms. Because Christians are “dead to sins”, we have to make even in the spiritual accounting book just as you fill in household accounting book, and because we are “alive to God in Jesus Christ”, you have to add credit to the book. Other verses use the word “gain”, “loss” or “interest”.

The New Testament also uses words in athletics and explains the

faith. Ancient Olympics was held in Olympia from 9 century BC to 4 century AD, and similar athletic competitions were held in three other places in Greece so that there was at least one competition every year. Therefore, there were many references to these competitions in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 says “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” In old days, the winner received a wreath made from olives but it got perished eventually. But those who completed the spiritual race were given an imperishable wreath from God.

Likewise, the New Testament describes the truth of faith using many examples in daily life with easy wording. The faith in Jesus Christ is not like classical Greek literature that is far away from our daily life or like Greek philosophy made up from cold logics. Rather, it is alive in all aspect of our life and related to our daily happenings.

2. Soldiers of Christ

The writers of New Testament use many of business and sports terms; at the same time, they were very familiar with military terms. According to 1 Peter 3:21, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” As it says “an appeal,” this suggests the custom of Roman soldiers called “*Sacramentum*” in Latin. means an appeal of your loyalty. Likewise, the churches called baptism and Lord’s Supper “Sacraments,” because Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of

lords, simply much greater than the emperor of Roman. Baptism is your appeal to God to be a soldier of Jesus, and the Lord's Supper could be a renewal of your appeal of soldier.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is described as the "Lord of Peace" and the "King of fight" with His soldiers against enemies. Needless to say, His fight requires no battle planes, tanks and missiles. Because His battle is spiritual and against the source of evil, drawing people away from God in order to destroy the world. Jesus Christ Himself will fight against evil, but Christians are also involve in as His soldiers.

How can we help Jesus Christ? At the beginning, we should prioritize our faith over anything around us throughout our lifetime. Paul taught Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:12, saying, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Believe in Jesus and follow Him, and keep living with Christ. This is the "fight of the faith."

This is also called "race of the faith. In Hebrews 12:1-2, it says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." This race is not competitive as it is in this world. The track of this race is set personally; some people would have shorter, or others might have longer. We don't know it could be flat or upward. God prepared the personal track for each of

us, and if we live our lives in faith it will be victorious. There's not competition and if we finish our race we'll be the champions to receive the imperishable wreath.

Next, the soldiers of Christ will fight against our own "passions of the flesh." In 1 Peter 2:11, says, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." And today's verses, 1 Peter 4:3 lists "sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry" as the examples of the passion of the flesh. So, is it alright if we only avoid them? In the Bible, the "passion of the flesh" implies that we do whatever we want without seeking God's will in the light of the Word of God, in addition of immoral things. Christians would not like to do immoral things, and they might do healthy hobbies and good volunteer. However, such "might-be-good" things sometimes put us apart from God, the "must-be-with you" thing and His glory cannot shine on. Thus, we always have to remember the fight against the "passion of the flesh."

3. Arm Yourself

Moreover, soldiers of Christ battle against obstructions of faith and the "desire of the flesh". In Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We battle against the spiritual existing behind variety of evil. A source of evil is called "Devil" or "Satan", and this battle is called "Spiritual Warfare". However, how can we fight against the devil or Satan? For the

corruption of society, we can raise our voices and influence politicians and administrators of governments and help the people who are in needs. However, how can we do for the fundamental evil which is bigger and deeper than the corruption of society?

The Bible disclose everything of the “Spiritual Warfare.” However, it is clearly mentioned that this battle is not with the power of human beings. Lord Jesus Christ fights against them. Christians are able to join the “Spiritual Warfare” only “in Christ.” According to Ephesians 6:10, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” With the power of Jesus Christ, the weapons will be given to us by God, and we will be able to participate in this battle. It is just as today’s reading says, “arm yourself.”

Then, how can we arm ourselves? Let’s look at Ephesians 6:14-17, “Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” There are six weapons. “The belt of truth”, “The breastplate of righteousness”, “The shoes readiness given by the gospel of peace”, “The shield of faith”, “The helmet of salvation”, and “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” The five of six weapons are protecting ourselves, and the only attacking weapon is “The sword of the Spirit”. Generally speaking, “Offense is the best defense” is widely known; however, in the spiritual battle of Christians, “Defense is the best offense”. No

matter how fabulous you are doing in your field, you might lose in this battle if you leave from the faith or you don't repent when you commit sin. You shall protect and defend yourself in order not to be prey of Satan.

After you have been protected, you can fight with "the sword of God's word". When I say "fight with God's word", it reminds you of Jesus in a wilderness after the baptism where Jesus was tempted by Satan. At that time, Jesus won against the Satan with the word of God. But Jesus is the son of God so that he might be able to win against the Satan with his own word. However, he used the excerpts from the scripture and said "It is written..." When you are against the temptations of Satan, it is powerless to say, "I don't think so." Satan comes into the tiny space in the human morality, and we are warped. What we can do is saying "it is written in the Bible..." or "God says it...". We need to deal with the Word of God. We shall believe in God's Word, rely on it, and make a declaration of it. Lord Jesus has already proved that it is the most powerful thing.

I had visited several churches for researching the worship style and the spiritual training program during my sabbatical leave when I was in California. I found a church which had a statement. It said, "We are all ministers. Pastors are equipping ministers." The word, "equip" was taken from Ephesians 4:12; "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." The word means "military armaments" or "to arm soldiers." Christians are prepared for the spiritual war and fight for the Kingdom of God. And, another church had training classes for Christians in several stages of spiritual growth. The Army gave a basic training for new soldiers for protecting themselves in battle fields, and the basic training is

called “Boot Camp.” So, the church also called the basic class “Boot Camp.” The church members established their identity as the soldiers of Christ through the training.

Armaments for the “Spiritual Warfare” cannot be done by just talking. I think we need training programs as many churches have. I want to arm myself as a soldier of Christ with all of you.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, all the believers are soldiers of Christ and go for the “Spiritual Warfare.” Since we often forget the fact, help us realize that we are the enlisted soldiers. Arm and equip us for the race of faith, battle against the flesh, and the “Spiritual Warfare.” Give us the “Boot Camp” program. Strengthen us by the power of Christ, and lead us to the victory. We pray in the name of Lord Jesus.