

Chocolate Soldiers

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 01 March 2010 20:48

What do you think Christianity is all about? Is the Christian meant to retire to an armchair to just read about spiritual exploits? Is he (or she) simply supposed to go to church meetings regularly and listen to preachers? Maybe attend a mid-week meeting or two, plus a prayer meeting? Invite folks around for tea and chat about the simplicity of the Gospel and watch slide shows about missionaries? Perhaps all these can be merged in the Christian life... but is that all there is? Not if we are spiritually alive!

When the Falklands War erupted in 1982, some soldiers were interviewed. They said that if they had known they had to go to war, they would never have joined the army in the first place! War is nothing to be smirked at and the trauma of it all must not be pushed aside or made light of. But, there is an odd sham about a soldier who complains because he has to go to war. Being a soldier involves being ready to fight at a moment's notice.

I know a shameful number – a very large percentage – of Christians who never want to fight for Christ. They talk about being soldiers of the Lord. They pray for courage to do battle. They chat about the state of the world. They denounce evil and cults, amongst themselves. But, like so many, they are just back-seat drivers... they always know better than those who do the actual driving. Another way to put it is that they are armchair critics, always ready with advice and comments, but never taking part in, or experiencing, the matters they criticise. They are more than willing to tell Christian soldiers where they went wrong; they tell them how to do what they do 'more effectively' or, with 'more love', etc. In short, they are chocolate soldiers: put them in the heat of battle (if you can get them there in the first place!) and they will melt away into the background. Later, they will tell the injured soldiers where they went wrong!

To these good folk, the Christian who fights in the Lord's work is a troublemaker; he is an extremist; he embarrasses Christendom (whatever that is); he likes nothing more than judging others; he is unloving... but, of course, the armchair critic knows exactly how the fighter should, or should not, behave and speak!

I remember the time I was at the end of my tether in my psychiatric nursing work because, as a Christian, I had to deal with violent patients. The deacon I spoke to tut-tutted that I had such lowliness of spirituality to talk about such things. Then he told me that he, too, had to deal with violence every day in his own workplace. Therefore, he said, I should follow his own example. Odd, I thought... he is a manager in a paper factory! He continued to tell me that the 'violence' consisted of union representatives who regularly met in his office and who sometimes spoke angrily. He was serious! I thanked him for his 'advice' and walked away. Next day, I was back in

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the violent situation yet again, waiting to receive my usual quota of fists, knives or broken chairs....

As Believers we are called to be soldiers of Christ. He is our General and He is on the front line at all times, between us and Satan. Satan is likened to a prowling lion whose sole task is to tear apart any Christian foolish enough to allow him an advantage. Yet, we sit in our comfortable armchairs, issuing our criticisms and watching from the sidelines. To armchair Christians, those who do the fighting are a sickening sight to behold – they insist on fighting in the thick of the battle; they come back torn and battered, bleeding from many wounds. From the safety of his armchair the critic tut-tuts and says that such behaviour is shameful!

So, how would these critics react if they discovered that the Lord fights?

“The Lord your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes.”

Deut. 1:30

Even enemies know that we must fight for those things we hold dear... the Philistines said:

“quit yourselves like men, and fight”!

1 Samuel 4:9b

The great apostle, Paul, certainly fought:

“I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.”

1 Cor. 9:26

Paul was able to fight because what he had was very real. Is this the reason, perhaps, that so many Christians refuse to fight the good fight... because what they claim to have is not real to them? This good fight is referred to in 1 Timothy 6:12; we are told that we are called to fight, tooth and nail, if we dare to publicly proclaim our salvation:

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

This fight is constant: it is our very way of life, as we read in 2 Timothy 4:7 – right to the end of this mortal toil:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished (my) course, I have kept the faith.”

This strongly suggests that we cannot retain the faith unless we fight, hard and long. Do you have the stomach to fight? Is God’s word that precious to you? If fighting is so wrong, why is it that the early Hebrew prophets and kings were praised for doing just that? In Hebrews 11:33,34 we are told:

“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed spiritual in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

Yes, this text speaks of physical fighting: but it is a *type* of spiritual warfare. No Christian can become strong if all he does is sit quietly all his life! Like a sword which gains its strength by being beaten repeatedly by a hammer, forced into the fire and then pushed into cold water to be tempered, so the Christian’s strength comes from entering the spiritual battle. If we do not fight for, and with, the Lord, then He will come upon us in our shame, for we are of no use to Him. Thus we read in Revelation 2:16,

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“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Which do you prefer: quitting like a man, or, dying as a scoundrel and a coward? Fighting the good fight of faith and thus proving your trust in the Lord, or, pretending there is no fight and hiding away? As for me, I will fight on, for the Lord goes before me and is victorious! I prefer the smell of holy war to the smell of hypocrisy and cowardice.

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