

**ARMED WITH THE ARMOR OF GOD TO REACH VICTORY**

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**Lemah Putro, Sunday, December 31, 2017**

Shalom,

In just a few hours, we will step into 2018. Like it or not, the clock is ticking away beyond our control. On the New Year's Eve, large crowds ring in the the New Year at the hotels or take to the streets, blowing their trumpets and enjoying fireworks displays. We have no slightest idea what the upcoming year has in store for us. However, at the end of this year, the Word of God has something to say to all of us. We can read it in Ephesians 6: 13 (NET Bible), " For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand."

How contradictory it is: Jesus, the Prince of Peace, proclaims the message of peace. But, why are we required to take up the armor of God and fight? Doesn't this imply that we are to go to war? The reality is that tensions and enmity have been spreading all over the world and even among nations. Does this mean that the message of peace is a sheer illusion? Who are we supposed to fight off? And what are we supposed to finish in order to be able to stand? Does it have anything to do with our work at the office, at school or at church that we have done up to the end of this year?

It is God's strong desire that His church has access in one Body and one Spirit (Ephesians 2: 17-18). Every time the turn of the year comes round, national as well as international TV networks air a kaleidoscope of all-year-round events in brief. Such a kaleidoscope may also apply to an individual.

At year-end, for example, a businessman is confronted with two possibilities - either a big profit or a great loss that can potentially put him under heavy stress. By reviewing the records throughout the passing year, a businessman can anticipate what is going to happen in the following year. If he has gained a lot of fortune, he will do his very best to maintain his success.

On the contrary, if he has failed, he will first find out the causes of his failures. Instead of staying down entangled in the failures of the past, he'd rather stand up and move on with great determination to make his success happen in 2018. But worry takes over when he remains apathetic, burying his head in the sand. He does not care whether success or failure lies ahead. And this will make things go from bad to worse in 2018. He forgets that he will someday have to take responsibility for all what he has done in his life before God.

How about your kaleidocope as a husband, a wife, a parent, a child, an employer or an employee? Did you have any problems? Did you find any solutions to your problems? If your marriage, household, profession or ministry is problem free, chances are that you are not or less responsive to the Word of God. Typically, this happens to those who live a successful life. Does this mean that God treats us unfairly? He lets some suffer endlessly while He lets others reap never-ending success.

How about your spiritual kaleidoscope 2017 from the Biblical point of view, especially written in the Letter to the Ephesians that will be the topics of study in 2018? The Apostle Paul reminds us to take up the full armor of God. What has happened before? Let's flash back to that period and we begin fom the last chapter of the Epistle to the church in Ephesus:

□ Ephesians 6:10 (NKJV), "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

The word 'Finally' wraps up the Letter to the church in Ephesus. In his letter, the Apostle Paul required that the Ephesians should take up the armor of God to fight against the attacks of the invisible "enemy," namely, the devil. Note this: The devil is extremely annoyed when he sees people living a secure, peaceful and successful life. Then, he makes every effort to bring about destruction.

The Apostle Paul also wrote 'my brethren,' referring to all of us - husbands, wives, parents, children, employers and employees (Ephesians 5:22-23; 6:1-9) - to join "the military service." Under no circumstances should they reject or avoid it.

Everyone of us must take up the full armor of God fight off the devil that will never stop trying to ruin relationships in marriages, families, economic stability, society, etc. in 2018. Remember that a husband is not to defeat his wife. Rather, together with his wife, he is to fight against the devil's deception. When the devil comes tempting a husband, for example, can he resist the temptation to keep his marriage from falling apart?

□ Ephesians 6: 14-17 (NET Bible), "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

One of the pieces of the armor that we must wear is the shield of faith which we obtain by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). By hearing, reading and pondering God's Word, we keep our faith growing. It serves as our shield to extinguish the flaming arrows of the devil. Faith can repel any attacks of biting remarks, hurting gossips or accusations and will eventually cool us off. This is what we can benefit from just one piece. Can you imagine how firm we can stand if we put on the full armor of God (truth, righteousness, faith, salvation and the Word of God) and stay unbeatable every time we come face to face with the devil's temptations and deceptions?

□ Ephesians 5: 1-2, 8-9, "Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God ... for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light - for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth."

We must admit the fact that we - small and big, young and old, married and unmarried, rich and poor, smart and foolish - once lived in the darkness of sin and went through numerous problems. For that reason, the Word of God reminds children to respect their parents,

fathers to raise their children in line with God's Word, employers to treat their employees fairly and employees to pay respect to their superiors.

To those living in darkness, everyone looks dark like himself. Once he has lived in the light, he can see favors and kindness of others. Nothing else but light can beat darkness. That's why we need Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8: 12) so that the darkness will leave our minds, thoughts and hearts once darkened by the power of darkness. Then we will become victorious children of the light.

Make sure that our light stays steadily bright. Never let it grow dimmer and dimmer. Failures may come with problems making us boil with rage, turn a deaf ear to advice and do disgraceful things, but Jesus comes saying, "Awake, O sleeper! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you" (Ephesians 5: 14).

□ Ephesians 5: 15-16, "Therefore be very careful how you live-not as unwise but as wise, taking advantage of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

The Church of God should stay awake and wise, making good use of the time available. Time is not simply meant to be spent for the sake of riches but rather for the sake of salvation. Doesn't the armor of God include wisdom to repel the devil's attacks?

Do we manage our time wisely - not only in church but also outside the church in particular where we spend more time?

□ Ephesians 3: 1-3, 6, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, that by revelation the divine secret was made known to me, as I wrote before briefly ... namely, that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus."

As a matter of fact, without Christ, we, the Gentiles, would have no access to the promised purpose - we would miss hope and God (Ephesians 2: 11-12). But, thanks to the Gospel, we are now fellow heirs to the eternal purpose. Knowing that Christ is wisdom, shouldn't we be thankful for the wisdom granted to us? Without His wisdom, one will go through failure after failure. Despite his physical blessings in abundance, his soul gets restless, underfed and unattended - a spiritual condition that leads him to condemnation. What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul (Mat. 16:26)?

□ Ephesians 2: 1, "And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins." We were once dead in our transgressions and sins. Everyone has sinned (Romans 3: 23) and the payoff of sin is death (Romans 6: 23). Don't get it wrong. Do we die because of sins? No! Did Jesus die due to His sins? Absolutely not! It was because of our sins that He died on the cross. Everyone is to die; so, never say that someone deserves his death because of his sins and transgressions. One thing is sure: Although we are still alive, we are spiritually dead if we commit sins. Someday when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will have to take responsibility for all what we have done in our lives (2 Corinthians 5: 10).

Sin triggers separation of husband and wife, children and parents and it also breaks off brotherly relations with others. That's why don't play around with sin however insignificant it may be. Watch out for a feeling of antipathy that always keeps communications at bay. This attitude shows that there is something related to a transgression.

We should be thankful that Jesus has raised us from the dead and made us alive to live with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2: 5-6). We do not focus on all the splendors of this world, but rather on heaven where we will someday be seated with Him, the Heavenly Bridegroom, on the throne of His glory.

□ Ephesians 1: 1-6, "From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love. He did this by predestining us to adoption as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will-to the praise of the glory of his grace that he has freely bestowed on us in his dearly loved Son." In reality, prior to the creation of the universe, the Triune God in eternity had created our spirits without sin. Didn't God create the world and everything in it, including Adam and Eve, in a superb fashion? Sin came on the scene when Adam and Eve broke God's command. Then came the devil loosening / splitting the first marriage tie on earth. Actually, the devil came to tempt in the first place, but man was skeptical about the truth of the Word of God.

Adam and Eve were not wearing their shield of faith properly. They first did not eat the forbidden fruit since they knew that they would otherwise die for sure. So, they did have the "weapon" of God's command with them. But the honeyed words of the devil got them to play down the Word of God which cost their fall into sin. Over time, their offspring went through one failure after another. Their son, Cain, murdered his brother. As the next generations married and gave in marriage, a great many marriages

hit rock bottom and still many other problems followed, because they were not wearing the armor of God anymore.

A married couple should use the shield (armor) of faith to help and support each other at the moment when either one is weak in faith. If they lack or miss intimacy in their marriage, they should take action toward oneness because the Bible firmly says that two are better than one. If one of them falls, one can help the other up (Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10).

Would you like to make 2018 a success? Put on the full armor of God (truth, righteousness, justice, faith, salvation, wisdom and the Word of God) to fight against the devil's attacks fiercely launched to crush our faith in all aspects of our lives (economy, society, politics, education, etc.).

Now we understand why God requires that we take up His full armor. It is simply because we come to face to face with a formidable enemy (the devil). Right from the start (in eternity), God chose and appointed us to be His children. He knew that we would fall into sin due to our disobedience to His command and end up living in darkness.

But, thanks to His mercy, He has made us children of the light through the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ, that has made it possible for us to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. For this very reason, let's give Him thanks more than ever before because He loves us like never before. Let's make good use of the time and opportunities that He gives us all the days of our lives. He is coming soon to meet and take us to live with Him forever more. Amen.