

The Everlasting Arms.

Deut. 33: 27.

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"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." So spake Moses, "the man of God," in the blessing wherewith he blessed the children of Israel before his death. (Dent. 33: 1.) There is little need to affirm that the blessing here pronounced -in its truest significance — belongs to the children of God in this dispensation; for "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with *all spiritual blessings* in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1: 3.) Indeed, there is scarcely a scripture in the Old Testament which has been more abundantly used for consolation. Feeble believers — weary ones on sick-beds — led, we doubt not, by the Spirit of God, have appropriated it in all ages; and they have been both sustained and comforted by the thought — the sweet assurance — that "the everlasting arms" are underneath them, folding them, as it were, in a divine embrace.

What, then, are "these everlasting arms"? Have we any indications in the Word of what is signified by the term? For though we may be able to *feel* what is meant, it will enhance our sense of the blessedness of the assurance, if we are able to arrive at the thought the term was intended to convey. Let us turn then, first to Exodus 28. We read there, in the description of the garments of the high priest, "And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel: six of their names on one stone, and six names of the rest on the other stone, according to their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, shalt thou engrave the two stones with the names of the children of Israel: thou shalt make them to be set in ouches of gold. And thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: *and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders for a memorial.*" (vv. 9-12.) Further on we have, after the direction as to the precious stones composing the breastplate, "And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of judgment *upon his heart*, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually." (vv. 21, 29.)

We thus see that Aaron, as the high priest, bore the names of the children of Israel, when he went in on their behalf before the Lord, on his *shoulders*, and on *his heart*. Now, the meaning of shoulder in Scripture is *strength*, as may be seen from the following : "The government shall be upon *His shoulder*" (Isa. 9: 6); and again, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his *shoulder*." (Isa. 22: 22.) The heart, in like manner, always signifies *love*, as there is no need to show. What we have then is, that the high priest upheld the children of Israel before the Lord perpetually with *strength* and love. An allusion to this may be found in the Song of Solomon. "Set me," cries the bride, "as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: *for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most*

vehement flame." (8: 6.) Here, it will be observed, we have the same combination of strength and love.

Applying this now to the term, "The everlasting arms," there can be little doubt that we have the same thought; viz., the union of strength and love in support of the children of God. That is, the everlasting arms are *everlasting strength and everlasting love*, wherewith God upholds, sustains, comforts His own, and folds them to His own heart in perfect security and repose; or, if we prefer to carry on the thought of priesthood, it is the everlasting strength and the everlasting love wherewith Christ, as our Priest, upholds us before God. Both aspects are true, and may therefore be blended in our meditations; and surely we may find in either an abundant source of instruction and consolation. We may briefly indicate the channels, in either direction, in which our meditations will necessarily flow.

If, then, we take "the everlasting arms," as explained, in connection with God — and this is in harmony with the context, as the preceding clause is, "The eternal God is thy refuge" — we may discover striking correspondencies in New Testament Scriptures. An example or two may be given. "None is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (John 10: 29.) Here the thought is presented to us of strength the almighty power, indeed, with which we are held in the hand of God, so that none is able to pluck us away. Speaking before the Father — indeed bearing us on His heart before the Father — the Lord prays "that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, *and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me.*" (John 17: 22, 23.) Here we have revealed the everlasting love of God — or rather of the Father — calling attention now only to this one feature. Both things are seen in that familiar scripture in Rom. 8: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, *shall be able* to separate us from the *love of God*, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (vv. 38, 39.) We are thus entitled to the consolation that we are secured in the embrace of everlasting strength, and everlasting love. And surely when we are borne down by weakness, or tossing to and fro in pain on a sick-bed, or lying wearily through long and wakeful nights, it will calm our hearts, hush every rebellious thought, yea, shed a sweet and soothing peace upon our troubled spirits, to remember that these everlasting arms are underneath us. Our hearts — poor, cold, and sinful as we know them to be — yet, folded to His heart, will be quickened to a larger response, as we feel there the beatings of that heart of divine love, and hear the blissful assurance that nothing — no power in earth, or under the earth — can ever separate us from this divine and everlasting love! "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

If we look, moreover, at Christ as our Priest, we shall see the union of the same two things. Indeed, it springs from the character of His person. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God," etc. (Heb. 4: 14.) He is Jesus — the Man, and He is the Son of God. As Man He was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin, and therefore He is one who can sympathize with the feeling of our infirmities; one whose heart can enter into, and feel with us in all our needs, and present us accordingly before God. But He is also the Son of God — He whom God "hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." (Heb. 1: 2.) Well then might it comfort us to remember that He who "upholdeth all things by the word of His power" is the One who is seated — having by Himself

purged our sins — as our Priest, on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and that it is He who bears us up there on His shoulders before God. Again and again are we reminded of these two characteristics — His heart and His shoulder (His strength) throughout this epistle. Take one more example. "But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost (all the way through) that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7: 24, 25.) He bears us on His heart in intercession, and He is able to save us from beginning to end.

Thus it is clear, also, that the heart and the shoulder of Christ sustain His people; and these are exactly the two things we need as pilgrims passing through the desert. It is true that our place is in the heavenlies; but it is also true that we are in the wilderness; and when we are made to feel that we are there, there is no consolation like that which the heart and shoulder of Christ can give us. His heart sheds brightness upon the gloomiest scene, and His shoulder will sustain us in the extremity of weakness in the presence of the mightiest foes. Thus He also folds us to His heart with the everlasting arms of strength and love. What courage, what endurance will the assurance not give us! And how blessed to give ourselves up to the sweet sense of security and of endearment which the embrace of Christ thus affords!

May the Lord give us to know ever more fully, and more practically, what it is to have underneath us the everlasting arms.