

Our Warfare

In the first Epistle of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, his young son in the faith, we read his exhortation to: “fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12). This theme continues to his second Epistle, where the exhortation is developed further:

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 3-4).

It is clear therefore, that the call to discipleship is a call to forsake the affairs of this life, to please the Captain of Salvation who has called us to enrol in his army. Again, Ephesians chapter 6 describes the nature of our warfare – not a call to arms in the conventional sense, but a spiritual battle against spiritual wickedness:

“... **we wrestle not against flesh and blood**, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand ...” (Eph. 6:12-13).

The chapter continues to describe the “whole armour” that God has provided for our use and defence – but there is only one weapon at our disposal: “... take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, **which is the Word of God**” (Eph. 6:17). All the other aspects in this chapter are defensive, but the only weapon is the Spirit-Word, which is used to cut down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. So we read in 2 Corinthians 10, our New Testament reading for today:

“for though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

In these verses, there are various functions of the Spirit’s Sword which we wish to consider more fully:

PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

The Strongholds of Sin are those lodging places in the Mind that are given to sinful thoughts and lusts. We must strive to eradicate those strongholds within our own minds, that we become spiritually minded like our Master:- “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5) is the Apostle’s exhortation. Christ Jesus was the “word made flesh”, we also then, must use that same Word to war against the flesh of our minds: “... for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: So that ye cannot do the things that ye would” and again a few verses later: “... they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-17, 24-25).

This is a fundamental aspect to our warfare: not only must we seek to build up, and edify the ecclesia, we must also pull down the strongholds of Sin. Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us of this obligation, saying that there is “a time to kill, and a time to heal: **a time to break down**, and a time to build up ...”(Eccl. 3:3). There is, then, “a time to break down” as well as a time to build. The work is more unpleasant, as it strikes at the very core of our being, the sin in the flesh which was condemned and destroyed in the offering up of the body of Christ. But it is necessary for our individual salvation: “the thoughts of the righteous are right; but the counsels of the wicked are deceit” (Prov. 12:5). We must endeavour

therefore, to purge our minds from the defilement of unclean thoughts, and think upon the things of righteousness:

“... whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things**” (Phil. 4:8).

CASTING DOWN REASONINGS

The next aspect of the influence of The Word is: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5). Here, the marginal rendering of the KJV for “imaginations” is “reasonings”: We must cast down the reasonings of the flesh. In our day, these sentiments are not seen as “politically correct”. This language directly contradicts the spirit of the age in which we live, where freedom, liberty, and toleration is openly accepted and promoted. Every man’s opinion is as valid as another’s: we all have legitimate “points of view,” and must have the freedom to express those “views” as much as the next man (or woman)! The word of God, however, requires something different of followers of Messiah. There is such a thing as absolute “Truth”, for Messiah stated in his Prayer to his Father: “thy Word is Truth” (Jno. 17:17). That which deviates from this Word is therefore not Truth. It is definitively false, and the disciple of Christ must declare war upon it, using the Word-Sword to cast it down that the Truth might be seen in all its beauty. Hence the words of Jude:

“... it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith** that was once delivered unto the saints ...” (Jude 3).

Of Israel of old, such faithful warriors were wanting:

“... they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like the bow for lies: but **they are not valiant for the Truth** upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith Yahweh” (Jer. 9:3).

Instead of being “valiant for the Truth”, the wicked fire their word-arrows at the righteous, proceeding from evil to evil. By contrast however, the faithful progress “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17), and they use the shield of faith to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (see Eph. 6:16).

Associated with the “reasonings” which must be cast down, is that system which exalts itself “against the knowledge of God.” The Apostle speaks elsewhere of this system of things:

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and **exalteth himself above all that is called God**, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (1 Thes. 2:3-4).

This is that great system of apostasy, which developed into the Catholic system, whose chief bishop – the pope - claims to be “God on earth”. This system, as revealed to John upon the Isle of Patmos, will be destroyed at the coming of Messiah to establish his rule in the earth (see Rev. 18.)

BRINGING EVERY THOUGHT INTO CAPTIVITY

It is written in Ecclesiastes that “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire” (Eccl. 6:9). Again, James describes the process of temptation: “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:15)

Both of these passages reveal that it is the sinful wandering of the desire, which draws us away from God into a cycle of sin and death. But we must be sober-minded, striving to control – and eradicate – those thoughts, bringing them into captivity to Christ. Those wicked thoughts originate from within our own selves: “for out of the heart proceed **evil thoughts**, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Mat. 15:19). Sin in the flesh prompts us to transgress the Divine Laws, and so we must seek to suppress the Old Man of the Flesh, and put on the New man of the Spirit:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, **and the unrighteous man his thoughts**: and let him return unto Yahweh, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

AN OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Whilst being a faithful warrior in the service of Messiah, the Apostle himself was not physically something great to look at. He evidently did not have an outward appearance of a soldier. Hence his next words to the believers: “Do ye look on things after **the outward appearance?**” (2 Cor. 10:7). And again, quoting the adversary concerning himself: “... his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10).

This state of affairs brings our minds back to the example of king Saul and David. Saul was a big man, and a mighty warrior. He was head and shoulders above the rest of the people (1 Sam. 10:23), and as such, was the obvious leader to go against Goliath, the Philistines favourite. Both men having an outward appearance of being soldiers for their respective nations, Saul ought to have had the faith to overcome the Philistine. But that work was left to David, a “stripling” (1 Sam. 17:56). When he was selected from his family to become a king succeeding Saul, Samuel was told by Yahweh: “look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for **man looketh on the outward appearance, but Yahweh looketh on the heart**” (1 Sam. 16:7). Being but a youth, David was not even considered for the kingship by his family: when Samuel came, they left him to look after the sheep. Even so Timothy was exhorted: “**let no man despise thy youth**; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). David’s father and brothers despised David’s youth and inexperience – yet he was the one selected by Yahweh to perform His Will against the Philistines: “out of weakness” he was “made strong” (Heb. 11:34). Being so strengthened in his warfare, David destroyed that which had the power of death, and so foreshadowed the work of Messiah in destroying the power of sin.

THE CAPTAIN OF SALVATION

Bringing our minds to focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, we see how that he is the Captain of our Salvation:

“... it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make **the captain of our salvation** perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10).

Of him it was said that “he hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not ...” (Isa. 53:2-3). Yet he was the One “made strong” (Psa. 80:17), for the purpose of waging a victorious warfare against sin. We are enlisted into his service, as soldiers, to earnestly contend for the faith, and he will bring us into glory.

Whilst in the warfare of faith, we seek to oppose the “reasonings” of men, our priority must be to war against the sin that dwells in each one of us personally. We delight in the revealed righteousness of Yahweh, yet find that we cannot obey as perfectly as we would like:

“I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22-23).

The “law of sin” is virulently opposed to the Law of God. Constantly we find ourselves doing battle in our own minds, seeking to bring our thoughts to the captivity to Christ – yet we find the law of sin instead bringing us into captivity to itself. Well might we lament with the Apostle:

“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24)

Yet the solution to the problem has been divinely provided:

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord ... there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 7:24-8:1)

Christ has gone before us, like David and the Philistine. The emblems of bread and wine which we come to partake of are emblems of victory. It was following the victory of Abraham who saved his family from the hand of the powers of sin, that Melchisedec brought forth bread and wine (Gen. 14:18), and in a similar way, we use the bread and wine to memorialise the victory of Messiah, as he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. “Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in himself” (Col. 2:15), and demonstrated the righteousness of God in so doing. As we come to take the emblems of Yahweh’s love for us, let us resolve to wage the warfare of faith, seeking to please the One who has called us into his service. Let us not become entangled in the affairs of this life, but with singleness of mind and heart, serve our Master in spirit and Truth. Only then, when our Master will appear without sin to those who look for him (Heb. 9:28) will we be given the privilege of sharing his victory, and be granted that incorruptible crown of life which shall never fade away.

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