

THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE AGAINST PRIDE

"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 and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

– 2 Corinthians 10:4,5.

SOLDIERS of the Cross are of a different kind and are differently armed from the soldiers of the world. Ours is a fight against the spirit of the world and against the flesh. It is the fight not only against the imperfections that came into our flesh through our forefather's disobedience, but against the natural opposition of the flesh to sacrifice. The flesh instinctively struggles to avoid sacrifice. Moreover, our fight is against unseen spiritual foes. The world have their swords and their guns as weapons of warfare. And the Lord has provided us an armor; namely, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the Sword of the Spirit, and the sandals of "the preparation of the Gospel of Peace." These are all weapons of defense, except the Sword. The Sword is an aggressive weapon. – Ephesians 6:11-18.

In the case of the Christian, "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," is to be handled to accomplish good, to be used in opposition to Satan and sin. But the thought of this Scripture seems to be, not that we are commissioned to fight the world, but that we are to strive to be loyal to the Lord, to fight sin in ourselves and wherever it might properly be under our jurisdiction, and to repel the attacks of the Adversary. The exercise of our powers in bringing *self* into subjection means a great deal in the way of sacrifice, much in the way of battling. God has given us "exceeding great and precious promises." The New Creature is made strong by these promises – strong in proportion as he perceives the significance of these promises, and feeds upon them.

MENTAL STRONGHOLDS TO BE CAST DOWN

The Apostle is pointing out that these strongholds which we are to pull down are in ourselves. Sin is entrenched in our minds, in our imaginations. Pride, selfishness and various other kinds of sin, are entrenched in us through the long centuries of the downward tendencies of our race. These things have dug deep trenches in our system; they are firmly fastened there. But, urges St. Paul, "Let not sin have dominion over your mortal body." Destroy the stronghold. Bring your entire being into subjection to the will of God.

By way of pointing out what these strongholds are – that they are *mental* strongholds – the Apostle says, "Casting down *imagination*s, and every high thing that exalteth." Our imaginations may be of many kinds. We may be beset by false doctrines and superstitions that have come down to us from past ages. The Word of the Lord is the only thing that can effectually cast these down and make us see God's real character, make us see His glorious promises to the Church now and to the world in the future. The Word of the Lord is the only thing that will cast down imaginations – ignorance, superstition, pride, unholy ambitions, idle speculations, and every form of thought that would lead us astray and hinder the work of grace in our hearts and minds. These imaginations of the natural mind exalt themselves against the true knowledge of God, the Spirit of God – "high things," the Apostle calls them.

We are to "mind not high things." The Apostle does not mean that we are not to mind the high things that are spiritual; for in another place he says, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:2.) In other words, Set your affections on the *very highest things*. But the "high things" of the world are very different; they exalt themselves against the things which are truly high, which are of God. The Lord's children are to be humble, not high-minded, not to be carried away by the empty

honors, projects and ambitions of earth. The desire to have a place among men, to shine in society, to have wealth and influence, to have whatever things would bring us into high esteem amongst mankind, is a temptation that the disciple of Christ must guard against.

It has been noted by those who have the care of the mentally defective that a great deal of difficulty lies in the imagination. It is said that if one visits an insane asylum, he will find one here who thinks he is a king; there another, who imagines that she is a queen; another who imagines he is fabulously rich and could draw checks for millions. The organ of self-esteem has been too large. The Lord only knows how much the individual himself has had to do in cultivating this tendency. But he has always more or less to do with the matter; the high imaginations and the desire to be great obtain dominion over him – get the mastery.

PRIDE LEADS TO MENTAL UNBALANCE

The same thing applies to Christians. After coming into the Church of Christ, they are still liable to the ambition to become some great one, to do some great thing, to find or promulgate some great doctrine, to discover **[R5889 : page 132]** some new interpretation of Scripture or some new type. All these are "high things that exalt." Our Lord gave a discourse upon this subject, telling us that when we are invited to a feast, we should not take a high seat, but a low seat – and perhaps afterward we might be exalted. To desire these things and to seek for them is to have "strongholds" of pride and unholy ambition in the imagination, aspirations for exaltation and honor. Then comes the thought that we are great, that we are worthy of attention, of special notice. Mental unbalance is there. The fact is that we are all insignificant, of very little importance in the execution of the Lord's Plan.

The Lord could have done all His great work without us and our cooperation, probably more easily than with us. But He very

graciously *permits* us to have a part in His work, for our own good and blessing. He is dealing [R5890 : page 132] with us as children and is training us. Having begotten us of His Holy Spirit, He helps us to overcome our weaknesses and rewards us if we do overcome them. He drills and disciplines us to fit us for a noble and glorious future. A part of this drilling as soldiers of the King of kings is our fight against self-esteem and a desire for great things, high things, according to the standards of this "present evil world."

"BRINGING INTO CAPTIVITY EVERY THOUGHT"

The thought of casting down unholy and unprofitable imaginations is also borne out in the final words of our text, that we are to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Whatever we *do* we have first *thought about*. We sometimes say, "I acted before I thought." What we mean is that we acted before we gave the matter *serious* thought. No thought should be harbored in our minds which is not in full harmony with the Word of God. As Christ was obedient to the Father in everything – saying, "Let not My will, but Thine, be done" – so every one of us should bring our thoughts into obedience to Christ. Our Redeemer is our Exemplar.

All the members of Christ's Body must have the same mind that was in Christ, must manifest the spirit of our Master. "Let us humble ourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time." (1 Peter 5:6.) No one can wholly follow the Lord without much of the spirit of humility, without bringing his *thoughts* into subjection to the Lord. This is not the time to exalt ourselves and to show how we can shine. But we are to "show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9), who has called us with this Heavenly Calling, not for our own sakes merely, but for His own glory and the blessing of others. God's glory is to be our chief concern always. We are to be efficient servants of the Lord, through His grace, not

of our own strength. If we are to be great in the end, we must be humble, we must gladly be servants of all now. We must be glad to serve, not only when there is honor attached, but when the service is unnoticed or unknown.

God has arranged for our learning certain lessons of self-control, bringing ourselves into full obedience to God in a voluntary way, with a view to our being His representatives by and by, and of then enforcing obedience to God's requirements on the part of the world. It is a generally accepted principle that no one is qualified to rule others who has not himself learned obedience. At the cost of great suffering, our Lord Jesus learned what obedience means. He promptly and fully submitted Himself to God. This Spirit of Christ is to be manifested and developed in us, that we shall thus be ready for the future work of The Christ, the work of the Millennial Age.

In proportion as the Truth is received and assimilated, it brings to us the spirit of a sound *mind*. It does not bring us perfect soundness of *brain*; but where rightly received, it brings meekness, teachableness, thoughtfulness, seriousness. It leads us to take careful heed to the instructions of our Heavenly Guide. It thus gives balance to the judgment, greater than we had ever *before* known. This should increase as we go on in the good way and become disciplined soldiers in the army of the Lord. But if the Truth is not received in the *spirit* of the Truth, in the *love* of it, it might not only fail to be of any benefit, but might engender a spirit of pride and boastfulness.

This quality of pride seems to be particularly associated with all kinds of insanity. Many of the inmates of insane asylums are affected with a large degree of self-esteem – thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think. Their minds are unbalanced in that direction to a notable degree. We cannot be too careful to cultivate nearness to the Lord, which always brings humility and a

proper realization of our own unworthiness and littleness before Him.

KEEPING CLOSE TO CHRIST OUR ONLY SAFETY

Satan is especially alert to trap the Lord's children in this "evil day." We might give an illustration which we have used before, but which seems well to picture wherein lies our special danger and our entire safety. Suppose we should consider a large circle, with Christ as the Center of that circle. Suppose the circle contained an abundance of space, so that there might be varying degrees of closeness to the Lord. Let the outer edge of that circle represent the utmost limit of God's care over His children. Any one, then, nearing the outside line would be coming more and more into a place of danger. We believe that in proportion as any of us live close to the great Center of the circle – our Lord Jesus – we are safe. In proportion as we fail to do this, and allow ourselves to drift or to wander away from Him, we shall be getting near the danger point, and are amenable to the evil influences from outside. Should we wander entirely over the outer line, our case would be beyond recovery.

The Lord has in a way put around the human race a barrier against danger. This barrier is, largely, man's *will*. Those who have given up their wills, their minds, to the Lord, to have His will done in them, are particularly liable to severe and subtle attacks of the Adversary. He especially seeks to delude and entrap the true children of the Lord, thus again to bring them into bondage to sin. Upon such as come under his influence, the delusion is gradual.

We are all born with unsound minds. As to the degree of unsoundness we need not quarrel. The armament which the Lord gives us is not merely a knowledge of how to quote Scripture. Neither is it merely to have the ability to dispute and to debate, though that ability is very good in its place. The real thing that God

is looking for is in our hearts. He is not looking to see how much you know; for He could pump a good deal of knowledge into you in a few minutes if He so desired. But the Lord is looking to see to what extent you are meek, patient, fully submitted to His will. Let us have more and more of the Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of a sound mind, and the earnest desire to help one another.

"The Lord shall judge His people." (Hebrews 10:30.) If they get into trouble through not being sufficiently watchful, the Lord will give them some experiences which will be good for them, if rightly received. Let us remember the warning words of the Apostle Paul: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" [R5890 : page 133] of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:31.) This means that when we neglect to judge ourselves, He has to do it for us. Then we are being chastened with a view to our correction, that we might attain unto the Heavenly reward and favor that is to be ours as New Creatures in Christ, if we remain humble and faithful unto death. If we continue to be meek and filled with the spirit of humility, not craving present honors and exaltation, but willing in perfect patience to await the Lord's own good time, our exaltation will come; and we shall share our Savior's Throne and His glory forevermore.

"O blows that smite, O wounds that pierce
This shrinking heart of mine!
What are ye but the Master's tools,
Performing work Divine!
How blest that all these seeming ills
That draw my heart to thee
Are each a proof that Thou hast set
Thy seal of love on me!"

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