

T. Austin-Sparks:

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

We wish to consider the matter of mentality in relation to our great spiritual warfare. The marginal alternative to "casting down imaginations" is "casting down reasonings" and William Barclay renders this "destroying plausible fallacies". In any warfare there are perils and threats to victory where there is a wrong mentality. On the other hand, the warrior has a tremendous advantage when he is of a right mentality. What are the plausible fallacies which must be destroyed if we are to share in Christ's victory?

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO THE HIGHER COMMAND

The first consideration in warfare is that of the Supreme Command. When we consider the Church as the fighting army we realise how important it is that there should exist no wrong mentality concerning the Lord Jesus who is the Supreme Commander. One aspect of a wrong mentality concerning Him is this: that He is One from whom we GET everything, instead of the One to whom we GIVE everything. There is a great danger of always thinking in terms of what we are to get from Headquarters, of what advantages are to accrue to us, of drawing toward ourselves; in effect - although we would never admit this - really putting ourselves, our interests, in the place of those of the Supreme Command. That is how it works out.

It is just at this point that "popular" Christianity has done a great deal of harm. Christianity has been put on a wrong basis, or perhaps to be a little more charitable, upon an inadequate basis, and the preaching is almost exclusively in terms of what we are to GET. We are to get salvation; we are to get eternal life, peace, joy and satisfaction - all this and Heaven too! But the emphasis is so largely upon what we are to get from the Lord Jesus, our Supreme Commander. It is at least an inadequate mentality, if not an altogether wrong one when it is made a principle; it is a misinterpretation of the whole Christian life. The right mentality - and the only one that is going to serve the great purpose and to minister to the great objective - is the mentality that is governed by the principle: "Give everything to the Lord" and not "Get everything from the Lord".

This is the governing principle of the Godhead, that to give is the way of fulfilment. In the case of the Lord Jesus, that is made very clear in one classic passage where we are told that He "...emptied himself... Wherefore also God highly exalted him..." (Philippians 2:7-9). Fulfilment, the restoration of His voluntarily laid aside fullness, came to Him along the line of emptying, giving, pouring out. That is the principle of the Godhead, and it should be the mentality of all who are engaged in the great spiritual warfare. We shall be knocked about, brought up short and defeated if we are all the time thinking in terms of what should come to us. The self-centred life is always the discontented life.

But the out-going life is the life of abundant return - it all comes back. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38). Those are the words of the Lord Jesus. Do you want eternal possessions? The way to receive is to give. We must not think only of the Lord Jesus in terms of receiving from Him, as though He were only there for our benefit. Those who have this mentality may feel that He is not giving as they expected, so they lose interest and become paralysed in the battle, useless as fighters and powerless as servants. The true mentality about the Supreme Commander is that He should receive the honour and the glory, the dominion and the power, and everything. It is true that He will give and go on giving eternally, our relationship must be not on the basis of what WE can get but of how much He is going to get from us.

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Secondly, there are the perils of wrong ideas about the Christian life. There is a prevalent idea that this is merely a matter of being saved and blessed. For many, salvation and personal blessing are the sum of the Christian life, a mentality which is sometimes encouraged by preachers and leaders. The Word of God makes it perfectly clear, however, that this life is something far more. We need to realise that the Christian life involves being actively engaged in the great conflict of the elemental forces of this universe.

That is the issue. Long, long ago, something tremendous was set in motion; and ever since then, down through

the centuries, the great purpose of God has been challenged and disputed. All through these generations the people of God have given themselves in relation to that one great battle in the universe; and it still goes on - the battle is not over yet. The real nature of the Christian life is that you and I, immediately we become related to the Lord Jesus Christ, are called into this spiritual conflict. We are involved in what I have called the ultimate elemental forces of the universe in conflict. This means no less than that the whole hosts of the kingdom of God and of heaven are on one side, while on the other side is the vast and vicious kingdom of Satan.

Do not have any illusions about the Christian life. The Lord Jesus did not allow His disciples to harbour any illusions: "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). That is frank and straight-forward. This is what we are in! It is a great privilege to be in it, but we should have no wrong mentality about the costliness of the honour. There IS joy and there IS peace. Thank God for all the blessings. We need, though, to recognise and adjust to the fact that we are in a battle, a fierce and unrelenting battle; a warfare from which there is no discharge in this life.

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO THE CHURCH

Thirdly, there can be wrong ideas about the army itself, that is the Church. The Church is the army, but it would be a wrong mentality to imagine that the Church is the end and object of everything. We are accustomed to say much about the greatness of the Church and we do not exaggerate when we do so. We speak of it in superlative terms as, "God's masterpiece" and we are right to do so. We are encouraged by the Word of God to think of the Church of Christ as something great and wonderful, even magnificent. It is a wonderful conception in the mind of God from all eternity; it has a very large place in the divine counsels; and it is to be at last presented to the Lord Jesus as a glorious Church. All this is true.

But when it has all been said, it must still be affirmed that the Church is not God's ultimate objective and end; it is, after all, no more than the instrument. It is but the vessel, the agent for God's purposes. There is something far beyond. It is perhaps the greatness of the Church that it plays such a part in the "super-greatness" of that object which it lives to serve. We must not think that we have to live only and utterly for the Church. We have to remember that, just as the army does not exist for itself, nor campaign in the field for itself, but in the interests of its sovereign and his kingdom, so the Church exists and engages in warfare solely for the glory of the Lord on the throne, and for His kingdom. If we have faulty ideas in this matter, we will find that they constitute a weakness. If we put the Church in the place of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves in trouble with the Holy Spirit. That is not in any way to displace or to belittle the Church, but only to insist that the Church exists for Christ. All our Church conceptions and procedures should be governed by the fact that everything must be for Christ's sake. We must never regard these as being ends in themselves, but only to minister to the satisfaction of our Supreme Commander.

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO MINISTRIES

We next come to the matter of functioning in God's army, which is the way in which we may well describe the ministries within the Church. It is important to correct any wrong mentality concerning the real meaning and value of ministries. Is ministry just a question of imparting knowledge and information? No, true ministry is something more than mere teaching. We are an army in the field, and what is needed in a day of battle is not lectures but provision for the actual need in which we are found.

Do you see the point? Here is the background of conflict. From time to time the Supreme Commander visits the various positions, gathers the staff together and reviews the situation. He assembles all his men and talks to them. But the scene is a scene of battle. It is a time of war and not of peace. The conditions prevailing are war conditions; the scene and circumstances are those of actual war. Why does he gather the men around? To give them lectures on the theory of military life? Not a bit of it! He calls them together in order to give help and instruction on how to meet the existing and immediate situation; to direct as to how to cope with that which confronts them at that moment.

That should be the nature of all our meetings and our ministry. We ought all the time to be a people on a war footing, ready to face emergencies, perils and dangers. If we had that mentality, that we really are in the thick of the battle, our meetings would serve much greater purposes, our ministry would be of far greater value. Our meetings must at all costs be redeemed from being just sessions of theory. We can reach saturation point as to doctrine and be unable to absorb any more. But if we are conscious of being right up against things and needing help, then we will find the help we seek. We ought to be at our meetings on this footing: "I need it; I cannot do without it; my situation demands it". If there is no demand, then the supply will be valueless. Our

meetings and our ministry must represent a provision for actual need.

And if we are in earnest, the Lord will see to it that we are in need. He will make things very practical, very real. He will see to it that our Christian lives are constantly brought up against new needs. Do not worry or think that things have gone wrong, if you find yourself up against a situation for which you have no answer. Our progress can only be on the basis of growing need. Immediately that stops, we stop. We go no further than our sense of need - our very acute sense of need. Blessed be God! He only allows this ever pressing sense of need in order that the need may be supplied.

All ministry must have a practical background, both for giving and receiving. May God save those of us who minister from ministering just theories or sermon material. That which is ministered must be born out of experience and actuality in life. The ministry must not consist in searching out subject matter, putting it together and then retailing it as addresses. It must be born out of life, right up to date. And there must be an active exercise on both sides - in those who minister and in those who receive the ministry. There must be action about it. There must be, on the part of all, a very serious quest, the seriousness of which is born of the desperateness of the situation; the realisation that unless we have this knowledge from the Lord, unless we have new life from Him, we will go under in the battle and cede victory to the enemy. That is the nature of those "councils of war", those meetings with the Supreme Commander, to which we sometimes gather. They are just that we may be equipped for our job - and our job is fighting. Whenever we meet it should be to get equipment for our very life work which is now on hand.

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO OTHERS

Lastly we come to wrong ideas concerning the other personnel in the army - the other people in the Church. We have many wrong ideas about one another. You know how easy it is to be selective, to look at the other man or woman and to write them off as not counting for much. That is very dangerous. Our kind of selectiveness, our judgment of people, may sabotage the whole movement. And what about ourselves? Where would you be, where would I be, if the Lord had been very particular that we should be exactly of the right stature and have full qualifications for His work? I know where I would be if He were so particular; I would be disqualified from any part in the ministry or warfare.

We must be very careful, too, that we do not contemplate others as competitors or rivals who are seeking to get an advantage over us. We must not be "touchy" about our own position and our own rights, becoming explosive if someone else is put before us, or seems to have been given favourable treatment instead of us. It is a horrible thing to think of such an attitude among Christians, but it happens only too easily. By taking personal offence, because of something that has been done that seems to be placing us at a disadvantage, we can be put out of the fight altogether and count for nothing in the battle. In such a situation, whether we judge ourselves to be in the right or wrong, our attitude must be this: "Lord, I am YOURS, I am YOUR man, I am in this just for YOU. Men can do what they like - put me out, put others over my head, whatever they like. That is between You and me, Lord, and between You and them." If you allow yourself to take offence and harbour a grievance, then the enemy can gain an advantage and you will become a casualty. You may as well be carried off on a stretcher straight away!

We need to remind ourselves that a favourite manoeuvre of our enemy is to get amongst us and make us look at one another and misjudge one another. What is the use of an army like that - with its men suspecting and mistrusting one another? What a sad state of affairs! The word is: "Casting down imaginations" - and if we only knew the truth we should discover that our grievances are not real but based on imaginations. This is the clever manoeuvre of the enemy. The counter to it is found in the passage which speaks of casting down such imaginations, "and bringing every thought into captivity... to Christ". Failure to do this may affect the whole issue of the battle. Lay hold of those thoughts about other fellow soldiers and bring them into captivity to Christ. Make sure that you are right, and even if you are right, be prepared to forgive, to be charitable, and above all not to make a personal issue of it.

A WRONG MENTALITY AS TO OURSELVES

How prone we are to have wrong ideas about ourselves. Paul said: "I say... to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Romans 12:3). What ought we to think of ourselves? In the light of God's grace, mercy and love and in the light of God's holiness, what ought we to think of ourselves? Paul continues: "so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith". That is, if we may take another saying of Paul's out of its context, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). The measure of our self-esteem will be in inverse proportion to the measure of Christ

Mentality of the Spiritual Warrior (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

that we have. How much of Christ have we received? Well, if we have a super-abundance of Christ, if we have more of Christ than anyone else, we shall not think highly of ourselves at all. The more we have of Christ, the less we shall think of ourselves or want to talk about ourselves. The less we shall want to be in the limelight.

What ravages such a wrong mentality could make in an army. Just imagine what would happen if its men thought more highly of themselves than was right and despised their fellows. It would play right into the hands of the enemy. Our safety lies in "thinking soberly". In this great battle it matters very much that we think of ourselves as we ought to do, and that is, in a related way. An army depends upon its units. The whole can suffer through the weakness of the individual. We can overestimate our personal importance or we can underestimate our related significance. To think of ourselves as we ought to think will mean not to err in either direction.