

A.B. Simpson:

"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 exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;
"And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." 2 Cor. 10: 3-6.

The world is fond of the pomp and circumstance of war, and conflict and victory constitute the largest part of human history. The Bible is full of military metaphors and the Christian's life is one long battlefield, but the forces engaged and the weapons employed are very different from man's campaigns. The greatest victories of the Bible all foreshadow these higher forces and hidden foes. The capture of Jericho by a shout of faith, the defeat of Goliath by a shepherd boy, and the victory of Jehoshaphat over his myriad foes by the music of a sacred choir; these are suggestions of those unseen powers which are waging the battle of eternity and fighting the good fight of faith.

It is of this warfare that our text speaks. "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh." There are conflicts in the name of Christianity which are not able to make this claim. When we try to serve God with an unsaved and unsanctified heart; when we endeavor to develop character by culture; when we try to build up the kingdom of God through social influence, intellectual power, skillful organization and financial methods without the Holy Spirit and the supernatural power of God, we are attempting to fight the battles of the Lord by the arm of flesh and we shall find it true, "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

The warfare in which we are engaged is the fight against sin, Satan and the world. The battlefield is very often within our own heart; the foe is invisible and the conflict is secret and all unseen by mortal eyes; but none the less is it intense and decisive for the issues of heaven and hell.

Indeed, it requires far higher qualities to stand true in the spiritual conflict than even upon the bloody battlefield, and "he that rules his spirit is greater than he that takes a city."

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual.

The first is the name of Jesus. We cannot fight under our own flag. Satan has little fear of us. The battle is not ours, but God's, and as we go forth making Christ responsible and meeting every temptation in His name, we shall be conquerors.

The Holy Spirit is our strength in this warfare. It was He that led Jesus Christ into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil and brought Him forth crowned with victory, and the Christian's most essential weapon is the "sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God."

Archimedes dreamed of a scientific process by which he could, through a burning glass, set fire to the ships of the enemy, and it is a question whether some day our marvelous scientific progress will not evolve, through electricity, a power so subtle and far-reaching that by a flash it can annihilate a battleship and explode a powder magazine, and thus, by its destructiveness, render war practically impossible.

But this we know: That in the Holy Ghost we have a "consuming fire" which we can turn upon every enemy, every temptation, every thought, every lingering trace of evil in ourselves and triumph "not by might nor by power," but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

The armor of righteousness is described as the Christian's breastplate, and indeed, it is a very panoply of victory. When Joseph was assailed by the subtle temptress, he was sin proof through one single principle; "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" When the men of Babylon were threatened with the burning, fiery furnace, they had but one answer: "We are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, but if not, yet be it known unto you that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up." Such a spirit is invincible. The devil never attacked the power of Jesus, but he did assail His righteousness. If he could only have got Him to turn aside for a moment from the will of God, he knew that human redemption was defeated and God dethroned. The spirit of implicit, uncompromising obedience to God, an everlasting "No" to everything that is contrary to His will, will carry us through every conflict and crown us with eternal victory.

Faith is a great weapon in our spiritual warfare. This is the victory that "overcomes the world: even our faith." "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." Through faith "they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Love is a still more certain weapon. When Satan assails us with wrong and injustice, his chief object is to provoke us to irritation and destroy the sweetness of our spirit. When we meet his fiery darts with a panoply of love, they are quenched and neutralized. Nothing can harm us if our love only remains unconquered. There is no sublimer heroism than to stand in silence amid misrepresentation and wrong, returning good for evil and like Jesus on the cruel cross simply saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The story is told of a poor African who was caught on the premises of a foreigner in South Africa and suspected of stealing some valuable articles that had been missed. He earnestly denied the crime, but the cruel white man bound him and forcing him to lay his hand upon the block, with one blow severed it from the arm, and sent him away bleeding and mutilated into the bush. A few months later, in the fortunes of the Boer war, this white man found himself in the bush, and one night he was compelled to seek refuge in a native hut. He was kindly entertained, and in the morning his host met him, and holding up the stump of his arm asked him if he recognized him. The man was horror stricken; it was the victim of his former cruelty and he was in his power. But the native smiled and said, "Yes, I could kill you, and you perhaps deserve it, but I am a Christian and I have learned that love is sweeter than revenge, and so I forgive you. You can go." These are battles of the heart that cost something and mean everything.

Patience is the twin sister of love and is also one of our effectual weapons in the spiritual conflict. Among the typical characters of the book of Genesis, much place is given to the story of Isaac. This is not without reason, for Isaac represents especially the victories of patience. He was always giving place to others. Truly this is the story of love in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Cor.: "Love suffers long and is kind; bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things."

Prayer also is, perhaps, our mightiest weapon. Our best victories are won by its influence.

Praise is a still higher form of prayer and prayer never reaches its victory until it becomes praise. Dr. Miller tells of a party visiting the Lakes of Killarney who were attracted one day by some beautiful singing in a cabin. They asked a girl who had just come out who the singer was. "Oh," she said, "it's Uncle Tim singing away the pain. He's just had a bad spell and it's the only thing that helps him when he is in great pain." Humble sufferer! He was indeed a "hero in the strife," and many of us would find his remedy for pain much better than our groans and grumblings.

Our text speaks of the "strongholds of the enemy," which we may "cast down" in this great warfare.

The figure suggests the story of Canaan and the great strongholds captured by Joshua and his armies from the enemy. There were three especially that seem to be types of our spiritual conflicts. One at the commencement of their campaign, one at its next critical stage, and one at the end. Each of these involved a great advance movement.

The first of these was Jericho, and it had to be captured before they could enter the land at all. And so there is in every Christian life a stronghold at the very gateway of salvation, some besetting sin, some inveterate habit, some insuperable barrier.

The second was Hebron, captured by Caleb after the land had been subdued. This represented the new advance movement to the choice possession of the land and may well stand for the strongholds that face us as we enter upon the deeper life.

There is always some crisis to be passed, some Hebron to be captured, some idol to be slain, some fight of faith to be won before we come into our inheritance of perfect love.

The third was far down in their national history long after Canaan had been won and when David had at length established his throne in Hebron. It was the stronghold of Jebus, afterwards known as Zion, and its heroic capture by Joab won for him the place of commander-in-chief of David's armies.

In like manner, there often remains late in our spiritual history some remaining stronghold which has not been captured from the foe. Perhaps it is a sick body; perhaps it is some victory over our circumstances; perhaps it is the salvation of some soul that has long remained obdurate, and when this is won our kingdom is complete.

Is God calling you, beloved friends, to some of these decisive battles, and waiting to cast down before you these strongholds of the adversary?

Once more our text tells us of the captives of this conflict. "Bringing every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ." Here the conflict seems to be confined to the battlefield of our minds and hearts. The foes to be subdued are our wandering, wayward and sinful thoughts. Surely, every one that has known much of the fight of faith has found that there is nothing more necessary or more difficult than the subjection of our thoughts and imaginations. All evil begins in some mental conception or some impulse of the heart. Impure thoughts, vain thoughts, wandering thoughts, anxious thoughts, remorseful memories of the past or corroding cares for the future: how great a part these things play in the tragedy of human life. God has victory for us over our thoughts. He is able to keep our minds stayed on Him. He is able to give "the mind of Christ," and "the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus."•

Finally, there is the aggressive warfare against evil in others. "Having a readiness to revenge all disobedience." But there is a limitation to this, "When your obedience is fulfilled." We cannot attack the sins of others until we have taken the beam out of our own eye. Our own spiritual and mental victory are essential for our influence over others. Therefore God has to keep back many a life from its highest calling until it has slowly achieved self-conquest.

The power that runs our factories and trains today was made millions of years ago in the bowels of the earth, when the sun burnt up the forests of primeval ages and turned them into mountains of coal. That coal is lying there on deposit now, and the miner brings it forth and simply converts it into steam and sets it to work moving our modern industries and even fighting our battles. But it had to be slowly deposited there first as a hidden source of undiscovered power.

So God is burning up things in our lives today and turning them into spiritual forces, and some time He will bring them forth for the battles of His kingdom.

Let us not be impatient while the spiritual processes are going on. What we are is more than what we do. This is true, alas, of evil as well as good. There are lives slowly preparing to be an eternal curse. There are others getting ready to be a world-wide blessing.

May God help us to be willing to stand on the silent battlefield of our own hearts and win our victory, and then go forth "strong in the Lord, and the power of His might," to fight the battles of the Lord and the world.