

Sermon

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TEXT: "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: 4, 5.

We need not review the steps by which the apostle passes, from a reference to particular difficulties with which he had to contend, to this general statement concerning his warfare with the sin and evil of the world.

In the great conflict between good and evil he viewed himself not as a spectator, but as a participant, an active warrior, leading a great host on to victory. His warfare was entirely different from that which is often carried on among men and between nations. "For though we walk in the flesh we war not after the flesh."

It was a warfare prompted by love for his antagonists; it was intended to help, not harm them; not to destroy, but to save them; not to gain the victory over them so much as to give them the victory over themselves. Moreover it was not against them directly, but against their sins. A warfare against thoughts and desires, principles and purposes, and not against men.

We, too, as Christian workers in the Sunday School and prayer meeting, in the church and home, are in the same great conflict, and when Paul tells us of the weapons he used, as he does in our text, and the means by which he expected to gain victory, we are interested to learn all we can about the subject, that we also may be successful and gain lasting victory through Christ.

Our text leads us, therefore, to speak of "the weapons of our warfare," or, in other words, of the means by which we, as Christians, can overcome evil and advance our Redeemer's Kingdom in the world. In speaking of these weapons we may consider:

I. *Their Nature.* They are "not carnal," but spiritual. That is—

1. They are not material, but immaterial. This must be the case because the things to be overcome are not material. "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." Our evil thoughts, affections and practices are immaterial things and the weapons used must be such as to reach and destroy them. But though immaterial they are none the less real, for the most real things in the world are immaterial things. "The things which are unseen are eternal." What is so real as the hatred and malice which prompts an enemy to harm us, or the love of a friend or of God that seeks our good. This then shows us why we should antagonize these forms of spiritual evil. Evil thoughts are the secret of countless evil acts, sinful affections are the cause of untold sorrows. By wrong purposes men strengthen themselves against the things that are right and that are intended for their good. These things must be opposed and overcome and the weapons by which they can be conquered "are not carnal."

2. They are not unrighteous, as the term used also implies. They are unlike those which the enemies of Paul used against him, and which he here rebukes. We can not "do evil that good may come." Nor can we overcome unrighteousness by unrighteous methods, nor promote holiness by sin. Sometimes men expect to accomplish something by the manifestation of anger, "but the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." We cannot remove evil passions from human hearts by vindictiveness or a spirit of retaliation—by treating men as they treat us when they do us harm. Men may exalt themselves when they ought to exalt Christ, and hope thus to promote righteousness, but their expectations will be in vain. These methods are carnal and unrighteous, and if our methods are like the apostle's they will not be carnal.

We must be sure that the means we employ to do good are such as Christ would have employed, or would now endorse, that they are such as commend themselves to right thinking men as well as to our own consciences, that they are worthy of the great cause we are trying to advance.

3. The weapons we employ or should employ are not such as we use to accomplish the ordinary purposes of life. They are not natural but supernatural, such as co-operate with supernatural powers and secure aid from on high. We need the power of God to help us in our struggles against wrong. The foes we contend against are such as the power of man can never overcome. To destroy the evil in human hearts, to keep back the encroachments of worldly desire and love, to assail successfully the great systems of organized evil, to overthrow the deadly evil of intemperance and to conquer the great

systems of false religion and idolatry, are works so gigantic, that the powers of men, be they ever so great or so good, can never accomplish. Force of character, power of will, the use of natural means such as argument, entreaty, rebuke and denunciation, are all good in their place, and may become tributary to the work of saving men and elevating society, but are not sufficient for the task alone. We need that which will secure help from God.

II. *The effectiveness of the weapons of our warfare.* "They are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Our weapons will be effective if we use the right ones and use them in the right way. We may mention some of the indispensable ones:

1. A righteous life. It is a power for good, an effective weapon for the destruction of the things that are wrong. Without this all other means are of little account. A person destitute of a righteous character and a Christian purpose can use no means effectively. A righteous life is a power for good, even if it be a humble and obscure one. It disarms criticism and commends itself even to an ungodly man. It attests the power and value of the religion of Jesus Christ by showing what God, through redemption, can do for a man. A person may lack great natural gifts, but if they faithfully and persistently continue in the paths of righteousness their lives have an effect for good that can never be estimated. We have heard of a foreign missionary who was so deficient in mental power that he could not learn the language of the people to whom he was sent. He could not therefore preach to the people in their own tongue "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Let him be recalled by the Board that sent him, said some, but his fellow missionaries said let him stay where he is. Though he cannot preach to the people in their own language he, by his superior Christian attainments and by his marked exhibition of Christian principles, is doing as much for the spread of Christianity as any of us. So on the foreign field he remained and continued, by a godly life, to show what a Christian life should be, and thus was righteousness proved to be an effective weapon for the overcoming of evil. We read in some of Paul's letters of the "breastplate of righteousness," and "the armor of righteousness;" but righteousness is not only a way of defending ourselves, but of benefitting others. To become righteous, and continue so, we must be the subjects of the Holy Spirit's gracious work, but the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," are of great value and wonderful power. If we want to do good in the world and win in the conflict between good and evil, let us see to it that our lives are above reproach and pure enough to show the purity of Christ's religion.

2. Another effective weapon against evil is that of prayer, prevailing prayer. It leads our minds away from the things of the earth to God and the concerns of the soul. It turns the current of thought, feeling and affection to the right course. It gives exercise to the emotions and powers of our immortal natures, and by that exercise they are strengthened and matured. It thus becomes an effective weapon of our warfare because it adds power to all the other means used. Prayer is more than a request. It embraces adoration and thanksgiving, gives expression to the deep feelings of the soul, and thus has an effect for good upon the one who listens to it, and who can say that this was not one of the designs of public prayer? But we have not yet mentioned one of the great designs of prayer, if not the chief one, which is to prove God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, and which he has not promised to do for us if we do not pray. It brings in this way the otherwise impossible things to pass, and difficulties that could not before be removed, through prayer cease to be. When hindrances to the progress of the Lord's work are found, it is our great privilege to pray until they, as a result of prayer, no longer exist. Many can give testimony to difficulties that have been overcome just in this way.

Prayer is God's ordained means of blessing needy souls and satisfying right desires. Other ways he might have seen fit to use. Without this means He might have chosen to advance His Kingdom, but He has not done so. Through prayer alone can we expect to overthrow evil and bring to pass the events that God has promised. By it the riches of God's grace are poured into our sin-impoorished lives. Through it we connect our lives and purposes with His great and beneficent designs. Through it we secure His favor, and power, and co-operation in accomplishing the things that we undertake in harmony with His will. If there is a work we desire to see done, believing it to be according to His will, we may pray until it be brought to pass.

3. The great means by which the purposes of the Christian warrior are to be realized is truth, the preaching, teaching and living of the truth as God has made it known in His Word. His Word lays emphasis upon this

great means of benefitting men and bringing to naught the works of Satan. The truth is the means by which souls are regenerated, "Of His own will begat he us with the word of truth." It is also the means by which they are sanctified. The passages of sacred Scripture which directly teach these great facts are numerous and well known, and need not to be here repeated. Our great work as Christians is to make known and spread far and near the great teachings of the Bible. The "great commission" clearly places that duty before all Christians for all time.

We are to be sure that whatever method we employ of doing the Lord's work, the truth is clearly set forth. We may differ as to method but not as to the work for which the method is chosen. The truth we must use whatever the method may be, and any method that adulterates, or nullifies, or scantily uses the truth is of but little use. We may follow different ways of working for Christ, but the truth must be in it all or our work is ineffectual. We must also use the truth in its variety and entirety. Consider what a variety we have in the Bible. Fact and illustration, comment and invitation, entreaty and warning, history and doctrine all blend in beautiful harmony, and we are to use it all. We are not to teach the law chiefly, nor the invitations of the gospel alone, nor theory without practice, nor practical teaching to the exclusion of the great doctrines of revelation, but we are to use the doctrines as did the apostles, as sledge-hammers to drive home to our hearts and consciences the duties presented to us by the Bible everywhere. We believe that it is what it claims to be, a revelation from God to men, and is to be used as God intended to teach men how to live and what to do, to warn them of danger and point them to Jesus Christ as their only Saviour, and thus to mould and elevate, purify and ennoble the characters of men. We should also use the Scriptures freely in all of our religious meetings and Sunday Schools. We should pack all of our sermons and addresses as full of truth as we can and not use it sparingly for there is plenty of it.

All of the weapons that we have just named are closely connected, and other means may be thought of which are associated with them. They are effective—"mighty through God"—because He approves of them and uses them. God makes them mighty. He makes them his instruments and accomplishes his great purposes through them. Other means we may well be doubtful of, and of much that we plan, or do, or say that has not the truth back of it and in it, we must know that it is of no benefit. God's cause may move on in spite of it but does not move because of it.

III. *The victories to be achieved by them.* We view the second verse of our text as explanatory of the last clause of the first. "The pulling down of strongholds" is described more fully by the language of verse five, which shows the kind of victories that have been gained and yet shall be gained by the use of the weapons that we employ. The language is highly figurative, as are the words we have already considered, and we must therefore in speaking of it for our present purposes use more ordinary and direct forms of speech.

The victories to be gained are as follows:

1. False reasonings are to be overcome. The word "imaginations" is called "reasonings" in the marginal readings of the text. There are systems of teaching that are in direct opposition to the progress of the gospel and the interest of immortal souls. They are the result of the reasonings and imaginations of men when the great truths of the Bible are disregarded. These we must oppose. Error must be met by truth. Correct reasoning on right principles must prevail against that which is false and vain. We must show to men how much more the gospel offers to them, and can do for them than their own speculations and all the philosophies of the ages. Many of the systems of false teaching have long since been dispelled by the promulgation of the true teaching of the Word of God, and all others will yet we believe meet the same fate, if we use freely the right weapons and trust in their power.

There are other reasonings besides false philosophies, speculations that are in opposition to the progress of the truth and the salvation of soul. We refer to the reasonings by which men try to satisfy themselves as they remain without God and without salvation, or the means by which a man will justify himself in a course of action that is wrong. We also have in mind the thoughts revolved over and over again by which many a Christian will try to make it appear to himself and others that the duties of the Christian life and the obligations assumed on becoming a church member do not devolve upon him. These are hindrances to the progress of the Lord's work, and are some of the things we must assail with the weapons we have named. Another reasoning to be overcome is that by which many a Christian attempts to resist all the appeals coming to him in behalf of a lost world, and the demand for money with which to support Christian institutions and spread abroad the Gospel. Many men do succeed in largely resisting all such calls year in and year out, and they do so by using a certain round of argument and reply, designed to silence the one making the appeal and their own consciences as well. Against all of these reasonings we must use most effectively the weapons at our disposal for these things are in opposition to God's law and human interests also.

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