

Spiritual Warfare (Luke 22:34)

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that spiritual warfare is a vital aspect of the Christian life, requiring preparation, prayer, and unity among believers.

Scripture: 2 Kings 6:17, Daniel 9:2, Matthew 26:52, Luke 22:36, Acts 16:11-34, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 2:2, Ephesians 6:11, Colossians 1:20, Colossians 3:16

Topics: "The Armor of God", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Christian's warfare is spiritual rather than physical, as illustrated by Jesus' command to arm oneself with a sword, which symbolizes readiness for spiritual conflict. He explains that while we may face personal conflicts, the true battle lies against spiritual forces that seek to disrupt the Church's mission and fellowship. The sermon highlights the importance of corporate prayer and the need for believers to be equipped with the full armor of God to stand firm against the enemy's tactics. Sparks encourages Christians to recognize the reality of spiritual warfare and to actively engage in it through prayer, truth, righteousness, and the Word of God. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to God's purposes and the fulfillment of His will in the face of opposition.

Transcript

"If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" Luke 22:36.

Later on Jesus said to those same disciples, "Put your sword back into its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). There must be a good explanation for the Lord's earlier command that His disciples should be sure to be armed, and among other possible reasons for this apparent contradiction I propose to concentrate on the one point that the Christian's warfare is not physical but spiritual. This is very clear from the whole of the subsequent teaching of the New Testament, notably from Paul's statement that "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Moreover we nowhere find the apostles - to whom these words were addressed - carrying swords as they pursued their ministry, so we presume that when the Lord said: "Put up thy sword", He meant that we should put away from us any idea of fighting against men and address ourselves to active participation in spiritual warfare.

The Reality of Spiritual Warfare

Although we know that the Bible teaching reminds us that we are soldiers of Christ, we forget that we are in a battle. We put down our troubles to other causes. There ARE times when we get into conflicts because of our own faults or strained relationships - then it is no use blaming the Devil for what is really our responsibility. On the other hand we must not become obsessed with secondary causes, people and circumstances, when the real issue is that extra element of spiritual evil which is the real enemy. There is a warfare in heaven and from this, circumstances can be created and people affected.

When, in New Testament language, we speak of heaven, do not let us think of that which is remote and far away, somewhere in or beyond the clouds. No, heavenly warfare is in the atmosphere all around us. The Devil is called "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). Now the air is not all above the clouds, but it is where we are as we breathe it now. The heavenlies are wrapping us round all the time and the spiritual conflict is in this very atmosphere. There is an illustration of this in the Old Testament story, when Elisha prayed: "Lord, I pray thee open his eyes that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17), and the young man had his eyes opened to see how near as well as how real were the unseen armies of God. Because we have a spirit, which is the medium of connection with that which is spiritual, this evil atmosphere is not always outside of us but sometimes seems to make the conflict inward. In one way or another, the spiritual conflict is very real and for it we need the Spirit's sword.

The Church's Battlefield

The occasion of this conflict is the destiny of the Church. All departments and realms of really spiritual work seem to provoke the opposition of spiritual forces, but the nearer we get to the great, eternal conception of God's destiny for the Church of Christ, the Church which is His Body, the more pronounced the enemy's antagonism becomes.

We meet spiritual antagonism in seeking to win souls for Christ, because it is only in this way that the Church is born. When, however, the full thought of God is brought into view, then the greatest challenge of the forces of evil is registered. This is because it is in the Church and in relation to the Church's destiny that the whole kingdom of Satan is to be met and overthrown. Hence, of course, the tremendous significance of corporate life. Even by small and seemingly insignificant means, moodiness or trifling disagreements, Satan breaks up the flow of fellowship among the saints. It seems strange that the vital power of the Church should be weakened by the moods and temperaments of God's people but so it can be. If the Devil cannot succeed by such simple methods he has many other ploys and complex strategies, all aimed at the destruction of the relatedness of God's people. So spiritual fellowship becomes a real battleground.

Some think that fellowship is a kind of picnic, a religious festival. We praise God for all the joys of fellowship, but the matter is more serious than that, and is so important that it can become a matter of real battle. The exercise and preserving of true heart fellowship with all other Christians - not just with those whom we like but with all - is a field of constant conflict. Fellowship is not just something that happens. We must fight for it. It is a great factor in the spiritual battle.

Conflict in Corporate Prayer

One of the main functions of such fellowship is the great corporate activity of united prayer. We need to be reminded from time to time that our seasons of coming together for prayer are more than occasions for bringing to the Lord a list of items. We have, of course, to be definite with the Lord and we have to ask Him for things. The real goal of our praying, however, must be not merely personal blessings but the triumph of

the will of God. Daniel gives us an excellent example of such prayer. He was stretched out for three whole weeks, fasting and praying, as he gave himself to prayer for the fulfilment of the great purposes of God. His prayer was based on what he "understood by the books" (Daniel 9:2). He knew what other servants of God had written about the divine purposes and he had those purposes in his heart. Because those purposes were in apparent suspension, because there was a contradiction of them since the Lord's enemies had been given an advantage through the unfaithfulness of the people of God - this was why Daniel was so drawn out in his praying. We are told that the result was great warfare in heaven. During the twenty-one days of this particular season of prayer, a terrific conflict had been taking place without his being aware of it. The very principalities and powers had been so stirred and roused by this kind of praying that they had withstood the messengers of God. A fight had been going on, and one great angel needed to come to the support of another, as if one angelic being was not enough and needed help to get through. The value of prayer is not decided by asking for things but the nature of the things asked for.

What God needs is a people who have seen His intentions and purpose, seen the destiny of His Son and of the Church which is His Body, and devote themselves to the fulfilment of His will. Such prayer draws us into a spiritual conflict, for which the Lord told us to be sure and have a sword. It is so easy to be discouraged, so easy to be put off or silenced. With our sword in our hand we must stick at it and press the battle through to victory.

The Ground of Triumph

For this prayer warfare we are advised to "take up the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11). It is not that we enter a prayer session by some mental process of thinking of the armour. It is no use when you sense that the battle is on that you should try to concentrate your thoughts on the various items of the armour. To do that would be to find yourself too late. You can only begin to stand if you are already girded beforehand. This is not an emergency outfit for special occasions but a manner of life for the Christian warrior.

1. The importance of truth. We begin with the matter of being girded with truth. This means that things must be real in our lives. If there is anything false about our position, anything artificial or unreal about our profession, then we will be ineffective in the spiritual battle. We must be free from errors in doctrine - that is very important. More than that, though, we must be living in the good of what we believe, not just holding some mental ideas without real heart knowledge of the truth. The spiritual warrior needs to be girded with the truth if he is to triumph.

2. Practical righteousness. "Having put on the breastplate of righteousness". What matters is what is satisfying to God, for that is His righteousness. The whole question of righteousness is that of God's rights, what He has a right to; and what God has a right to must accord with His own nature. God is always right, He is just and true. He therefore must have that which satisfies Him and He has found this in His Son whose righteousness is imputed to us. The wiles of the Devil are always directed against that, trying to get us off the ground where we stand in the absolute satisfaction of God by faith. The enemy keeps saying, "God is dissatisfied with you, He has this and that against you" so to counter his accusations we must hold fast to the fact that full righteousness is supplied to us through faith in Jesus Christ. It is His righteousness which alone can protect that most vital part. No doubt this also makes a reference to the need for that righteousness to work out in our lives in a practical way, for anything unrighteous in our dealings or behaviour will mean that we cannot stand against Satan.

3. The Good News of peace. "Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace". We need not become too involved with the reference to our feet, but rather stress the point that God's message is good news of peace. Anybody with that message is a menace to the kingdom of darkness, for the enemy is always endeavouring to oppress us with bad news. We must go to the world with the good news that God offers perfect peace to the troubled heart and mind. Satan never minds us going to people with bad news, or with a face that suggests gloom, but he hates to have Christians spreading the glad news of peace. Paul and Silas went to Philippi with good news, the gospel of peace, and the enemy did his best to take that off their faces and out of their voices (Acts 16:11-34). He did not succeed. They triumphed over him because the very spirit of the good news was in their hearts. It is a tremendous strength against the Devil to be standing in the good of the glad tidings of peace. Christ "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). There is now no need for estrangement or depression. God is for you. He has shown that in Christ. Stand and walk in the power of His peace.

4. The shield of faith. We must take up and make good use of this big - or overall - shield of faith. Faith is all-embracing and relates to every possible aspect of the conflict. There can be no triumph in the spiritual life without the full exercise of vital faith.

5. The assurance of salvation. Clear assurance about salvation needs to cover the head as a helmet. How many arguments, debates, fears and uncertainties are ready to impinge upon our minds and paralyse our value to the Lord. The salvation of the Lord is mighty, and we must use it to protect our minds from succumbing to satanic assaults. His strong salvation is the only cover which can do this.

6. The Word of God. Finally there is "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God". We know how the Lord Jesus met the enemy in the wilderness with apt quotations from God's Word. He had so soaked Himself in the Old Testament that the right emphasis came to Him at the right moment. We, too, are told to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). Do not let any of us think that we are going to triumph in the spiritual warfare if we neglect our Bibles, any more than we can do so if we neglect prayer. Try to do without prayer and the Word and you will be worsted in the fight. You will be a soldier without a sword!

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