

Warfare

by William MacDonald

True Christianity is a struggle to the death, an unceasing conflict against the forces of hell, and requires unity, austerity, suffering, obedience, and courage.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 8:9, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 2:3, 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 2:3-4

Topics: "Discipleship", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the concept of spiritual warfare in Christianity, contrasting it with the superficiality of modern church culture. He asserts that true discipleship involves unity, humility, sacrificial living, and a commitment to the struggle against evil forces. MacDonald highlights the necessity of obedience, skill in using spiritual weapons like prayer and Scripture, and the importance of understanding the enemy's strategies. He calls for Christians to be courageous and undistracted in their mission, reminding them that the battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness. The sermon challenges believers to live with purpose and dedication, reflecting on the sacrifices made for the sake of the Gospel.

Transcript

One could scarcely read the New Testament even casually without realizing that the figure of warfare is often used to describe Christ's program on earth. True Christianity is far removed from the hurdy-gurdy entertainment of modern Christendom. It is not to be confused with the luxury-living and pleasure-seeking that are so rampant today. Rather, it is a struggle to the death, an unceasing conflict against the forces of hell. No disciple is worth his salt who does not realize that the battle is drawn and that there is no turning back.

In war, there must be unity. It is no time for petty bickering, for partisan jealousies, for divided loyalties. No house divided against itself can stand. Therefore, the soldiers of Christ must be united. The way to unity is through humility. This is clearly taught in Philippians 2. It is impossible to have strife with a truly humble man. It takes two to make a fight. "Only by pride cometh contention." Where there is no pride, there is no room for contention.

War demands austerity and sacrificial living. In wars of any consequence, there is invariably a vast system of rationing. It is high time that Christians realized that we are at war and that expenditures must be cut to a minimum so that as much of our resources as possible can be thrown into the struggle.

Not many see this as clearly as a young disciple named R_____ M_____. In 1960, he was president of the freshman class of a Christian school. During his term, it was proposed that expenditures be made for the usual class parties, jackets, and a class gift. Rather than approve such expenditures which did not contribute directly to the furtherance of the gospel, R_____ M_____ resigned from his post as president. The following letter was distributed to his fellow classmen on the day his resignation was announced:

Dear Classmates:

Since the matters of class parties, jackets, and the class gift have been brought before the Cabinet, I, as the president of the class have been considering the Christian attitude toward these areas.

I think we would find the greatest joy for our own selves in giving ourselves, our money, and our time entirely for Christ and for others, thus finding the reality of His Words: 'He who loses his life for My sake will find it.'

For Christians to spend their money and time on things that do not result in a definite witness to the unbeliever or for the building up of His children in Him would seem to be inconsistent with the facts that 7000 people die daily from starvation and over half the world has never heard of man's only Hope.

How much more glory we could give to God by helping to spread the Gospel to the other 60% of the world who have never heard of Jesus Christ or even in many neighboring homes instead of coming together in a little clique by ourselves, limiting our social well-roundedness to those of like mind, and wasting money and time for our own pleasure.

Since I am aware of specific needs and opportunities where finances can be used to such great advantage to the glory of Jesus Christ and for helping my neighbor here and abroad, it is impossible for me to allow class funds to be spent unnecessarily on ourselves. If I were one of those who are in so great a need, as I know of so many to be in, I would want those who have the ability to do all that they could to supply me with the Gospel and with my material needs.

"And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."

"But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

Therefore it is with love and prayer, that you might see the Lord Jesus giving His all (2 Corinthians 8:9), that I hereby submit to you my resignation as president of the class of '63.

In Him with you,

R_____ M_____

War demands suffering. If young men today are willing to lay down their lives for their country, how much more willing should Christians be to lose their lives for Christ's sake and the gospel. A faith that costs nothing is worth nothing. If the Lord Jesus means anything to us at all, He should mean everything to us, and no considerations of personal safety or immunity from suffering should deter us in our service for Him.

When the apostle Paul sought to defend his apostleship against the attacks of his small-souled critics, he did not point to his family background or his education or his worldly attainments. Rather, he pointed to his sufferings for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I, forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

In delivering his noble challenge to son Timothy, he urged, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

War demands implicit obedience. A true soldier will follow the orders of his superior without questions and without delay. It is preposterous to think that Christ could be satisfied with anything less. As Creator and Redeemer, He has every right to expect that those who follow Him into battle will obey His orders promptly and completely.

War demands skill in the use of weapons. A Christian's weapons are prayer and the Word of God. He must give himself to fervent, believing, persevering prayer. Only thus can the strongholds of the enemy be pulled down. Then, too, he must be proficient in the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The enemy will do everything in his power to trick him into dropping this sword. He will cast doubts upon the inspiration of the Scriptures. He will point to alleged contradictions. He will bring opposing arguments from science and philosophy and human traditions. But the soldier of Christ must stand his ground, proving the effectiveness of his weapon by using it in season and out of season.

The weapons of the Christian warfare seem ridiculous to the man of the world. The plan that proved effective against Jericho would be ridiculed by military leaders today. Gideon's insignificant army would evoke only ridicule. And what shall we say of David's slingshot, of Shamgar's ox-goad, and of God's paltry army of fools down through the centuries? The spiritual mind knows that God is not on the side of the biggest battalions, but rather that He loves to take the weak and poor and despised things of this world and glorify Himself through them.

War demands a knowledge of the enemy and of his strategy. So it is in the Christian warfare. "For 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" (Ephesians 6:12). We know that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15). A trained Christian soldier knows that his bitterest opposition will not come from the drunkard, or the common thief, or the harlot, but rather from professed ministers of religion. It was the religious leaders who nailed the Christ of God to the cross. It was religious leaders who persecuted the early church. Paul met his most savage attacks from the hands of those who professed to be God's servants. So it has been down through the years. Satan's ministers are transformed as the ministers of righteousness. They speak religious language, they wear religious clothes, and they act with an affected piety, but their hearts are filled with hatred for Christ and for the gospel.

War demands undistractedness. "Every one who serves as a soldier avoids becoming entangled in the affairs of civil life, so that he may satisfy the officer who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:4, Weymouth). The

disciple of Christ learns to be intolerant of anything that might stand between his soul and complete devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is ruthless without being offensive, firm without being discourteous. But he has one passion and one passion alone. Everything else must be brought into captivity.

War demands courage in the face of danger. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore..." (Ephesians 6:13, 14a). It has often been pointed out that the armor of the Christian soldier in Ephesians 6:13-18 makes no provision for retreat. Why retreat? If "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," if no one can be successfully against us because God is for us, if victory is assured before we ever start to fight, how can we ever think of turning back?

What though I stand with the winners,

Or perish with those that fall?

Only the cowards are sinners,

Fighting the fight is all.

Strong is my foe, who advances,

Snapped is my blade, O Lord;

See their proud banners and lances--

But spare me the stub of a sword.

--quoted by Amy Carmichael

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