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Mentality of the Spiritual Warrior

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"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 strong holds); 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).

Taking the latter part of the above passage: "Casting down imaginations" (the margin gives as an alternative "reasonings")... and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ", we will now look together at the matter of mentality in relation to this great spiritual warfare. The perils and threats to victory of a wrong mentality; the tremendous advantage of a right mentality. I am again drawing upon the book to which reference has been made throughout these chapters. Although, in that book, the word 'mentality' is not specifically employed, what I am saying is certainly found there in substance.

A Wrong Mentality As To The Higher Command

Returning to the subject of our first consideration—that of the Supreme Command—let us state at once that there exist perils of a wrong mentality concerning the Lord Jesus, the Supreme Commander of all the Forces in the field which go by the name of the Church. The wrong mentality concerning Him is this: that He is One *from* whom to *get* everything, instead of the One *to* whom to *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 should never admit this—really putting ourselves, our interests, in the place of those of the Supreme Command; for 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 upon 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 as well! 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. We will come back to that in a moment. The right mentality—and, mark you, 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’; not ‘Get everything from the Lord.’

This is the governing principle of the Godhead, the principle that to give is the way of fulfilment. In the case of the Lord Jesus, that is made very clear in one classic passage of the Apostle Paul. We are told that He “emptied Himself... becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:7–9). Fulfilment, the restoration of His voluntarily laid aside fulness, came to Him along the line of emptying, giving, pouring out. For that is, I repeat, the principle of the Godhead, and it is to be the mentality of all those who are engaged in this great warfare. We shall be knocked about, brought up short, arrested, defeated, just in so far as we are all the time thinking in terms of what should come to us. Let us make no mistake about it: it will be like that. The self-centred life is always the discontented life. The possessive life is the circumscribed 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—but don’t do it with this motive—is to *give*. That is the principle. You see the wrongness of the kind of mentality about the Lord Jesus that feels He should all the time be giving, giving; that we must more and more receive from Him: that He is only there for our benefit! You see how false that is, how unsound and how dangerous: because, immediately we find that He is not giving like that and things are becoming a little difficult, we lose interest in the whole matter, and become paralyzed in battle, helpless as fighters, impotent in service. It is due to a wrong mentality about the Supreme Command. He is there to receive the honour and the glory and the riches, and the dominion and the power, and everything. And while He *will* give and give and give, eternally give, our relationship to Him must be on the basis, not of how much *we* are going to 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 the prevalent idea that the Christian life is merely a matter of being saved and being blessed; salvation and blessing, and all that goes with salvation. For many, this is the sum of the Christian life; this is how it is put by many Christian preachers and leaders, and this is the mentality which is encouraged. But the Word of God makes it perfectly clear that the Christian life is something far more than that. Our mentality, or

'mindedness', concerning it, should be that of being involved in, and a part of, the great conflict of the ultimate elemental forces of this universe.

For 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, men of God, have given themselves in relation to that one great battle in the universe; and it still goes on—it is not at an end 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 *that*, involved in *that*. We are involved in what I have called the ultimate elemental forces of this universe in conflict: no less than the whole hosts of the Kingdom of God and of Heaven, on the one side, and, on the other side, this vast and vicious kingdom of Satan.

That is the Christian life! Do not have any illusions about it! The Lord Jesus allowed no one to have illusions about it: "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). You see, that is straight, frank, candid and honest. This is what we are in! It is a great privilege to be in it, a great honour to be in it, but that is it. Let us have no wrong mentality about this. Through getting a wrong mentality about it, many people have become disappointed. They wonder, sometimes; they say: 'Well, I did not bargain for this; this is not what I expected, this is not what I became a Christian for. They told me that my life was going to be full of joy and happiness and peace, that everything was going to be beautiful and lovely, and that I would have a wonderful time—but now what have I landed into?' Well, there *is* joy and there *is* peace; there is *all* that, thank God; but we have to recognize and to adjust to the fact that we are in a battle, a fierce, unrelenting battle; and there is no discharge from the battle 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. It is possible to have a wrong mentality about this. The wrong mentality that is possible—and I would say this with emphasis—is that the Army, the Church, is the end and the object of everything. Now, we say much about the greatness of the Church, and we in no way exaggerate in so doing. We speak of it in superlative terms, as 'God's masterpiece', and so on. We are encouraged by the Word of God to think of it as something great and wonderful, even magnificent. Yes, the Church is a very wonderful conception in the mind of God from eternity; the Church has a very large place in the Divine counsels; it is to be presented at last to the Lord Jesus as a glorious Church. I will not recount all the great things that have been or could be said about it.

But, when all has been said that could be said, we have still to say: The Church is not *the* object, it is not *the* end; the Church is not the *ultimate*! The Church is, after all, no more than the instrument; it is but the vessel, it is but the agent. There is something beyond the Church—the Church only exists for something else. Perhaps its greatness in fact derives from the 'super-greatness' of the object which it is to serve. Let us, then, not make the Church the end, the 'everything'; let us not think that we have to live only and utterly and ultimately for the Church. We have to remember that, just as the Army does not exist for itself, does not go out in the campaign, into the field, for itself, but in the interests of the sovereign and his kingdom, so the Church exists and engages in warfare solely for the glory of the Throne, for the glory of the One on the Throne, for the glory of the Kingdom. That is the object of the Church's existence.

If we have faulty ideas here, we shall find that they constitute a weakness. If we put the Church in the place of Jesus Christ, we shall find ourselves in trouble with the Holy Spirit. That is not in any way to displace or to belittle the Church: but the Church exists for Christ. All our Church conceptions, all our relationships in that connection, indeed everything to do with that, should be governed by the fact that everything is for Christ—it is for Christ's sake. Why the Church, and why all that is said about the Church and related life? It is for Christ's sake! We must regard them as being, not ends in themselves, but for the satisfaction of Christ. We must have a clear mentality on this matter, and put Him in His rightful place.

A Wrong Mentality As To Ministries

We come next to the matter of functioning in the Army, or, to speak in spiritual terms, the ministries, the functions. Here again we can have wrong, defective, faulty ideas and mentality, and it may be that we need to make a little adjustment over this matter. What is the real meaning and value of ministries? Is ministry just a question of imparting knowledge and information? A great amount of that is, of course, done, in and by ministry. But is that what it is for—just teaching? No, the function of this ministry is something more than the imparting of knowledge and information. We are an Army in the field, and what is needed in a day of battle is not lectures—it is provision for the actual need in which we are found. If we come to the ministry provided in a condition of conscious need, we are in a way of getting real value. But if we are only coming for the sake of attending meetings and hearing addresses and receiving more and more knowledge and information, we shall never thereby be qualified for this battle.

Do you see the point? Here is this background of conflict. From time to time the Supreme Command 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, 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, with that which they are up against right there and then.

And that ought to be the nature of all our meetings and our ministry. We ought all the time to be a people on a war footing, right up against emergencies, threats, perils and dangers. If we had that mentality, that we really are so engaged; that we are right up against a very persistent and cunning enemy; that we are in truth in the thick of the battle—our meetings would serve much greater purposes, our ministry would be of far greater value. Suffer this emphasis and stress. Our meetings must at all costs be redeemed from being just sessions of theory. We can reach saturation point in that way, so that we are unable to take any more. But if we are right in this battle, and really meaning business, if we are up against things and want help, we shall go where help is to be found. We ought to be at our meetings on this footing: 'I need it, I cannot do without it, my situation demands it.' But if there is no demand, how valueless will be the supply! We need to get our mentality adjusted over this. Our meetings and ministry must represent a provision for immediate, actual need.

And if we really are in the business, the Lord will see to it that we are in need, all right! 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, do not think things have gone wrong, if you find yourself up

against a situation for which you have no answer! The Lord is doing that to keep you moving on. Our progress is only along that line, on the basis of growing need. Immediately that stops, we stop. We go no further than our sense of need—and our very acute sense of need. The Lord keeps most of us there, does He not?—in a way of very real, practical need: more need, and ever more need. Blessed be God! He only does it in order that the need may be supplied. But when things become a matter of course, a matter of habit, a matter of—‘Well, we are going along to the meeting because it is meeting night’—then we simply make every supply dead. May the Lord bring us together every time as in uniform, that is, on a war footing, as in a council of war.

All ministry must have a practical background, both for giving and for receiving. God save those of us who minister from ministering just theories and material! The Lord keep all who minister on the basis of a very practical background, so that what is ministered is born out of experience and actuality in life. The ministry must not consist in searching out matter and putting it together and retailing it as addresses. Not at all! It must be born out of life, right up to date. And there must be active exercise on both sides—in those who minister and in those who receive. It must be a practical matter: 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 situation being that, unless we have this knowledge from the Lord, unless we have life from the Lord, we are going under in the battle, the enemy is going to gain. That is the nature of those councils of war, those ‘conferences’, those meetings with our Supreme Commander, to which we sometimes gather. They are just that we may be equipped for our job—and our job is fighting. Our object at all such meetings 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. Some of them are hardly worthy of mention. You know how easy it is to be selective, to look at the other man or woman and write them off as not counting for much, saying, ‘Now this one, you know, this one counts for something, means something; this one has got measure. But that other one, well—no.’ Be very careful! That is dangerous. Our kind of selectiveness, our judgment of people, may sabotage the whole movement. And, after all, what about ourselves? Where would you be, where would I be, if the Lord had been very particular, very particular *indeed*, to have the right measure and stature and quality? Where would *I* be? where would *you* be? I know where I would be: I would not be in this warfare or ministry! I settled it with the Lord, long ago, that *He* must provide all the qualifications to keep me in. But, you see, He has to do that with the others as well, and He can. We must be very careful about this matter.

We must be very careful, too, that we do not, as is sometimes done, contemplate others as competitors and rivals who are seeking to get an advantage over us. We must not be ‘touchy’ about our own position and our own rights and prerogatives; be very touchy and explosive if someone else is put before us, or seems to have been put in our place, given a favour, and so on. It is a horrible thing to think of such an attitude amongst Christians, but it can happen 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 at once—put right out of the battle! In such a situation, whether we judge it to be right or wrong, our attitude must be this: ‘Lord, I am *Yours*, I am *Your* man, I am in this for *You*. Men can do what they like—put me out, put others over my head; they can do what they like. That is between You and me, Lord, and between You and them.’ You see, if you allow

yourself to take offence, be hurt and grieved because of others, the enemy can come in on that ground, and you will become a casualty—you may as well be carried out on a stretcher straight away! If you are going down in that way you are no use to the fight. Be careful! Let us be careful of our attitudes, of our mentality, when it involves other people.

That could be enlarged upon, but we leave it there, with just the reminder that a favourite manoeuvre of our enemy is to get amongst us and make us look at one another and misjudge one another, misinterpret one another, get us mistrusting one another. And what is the good of an Army like that—all looking at one another with questions or suspicions or hurt feelings! What a state of mind! The word is: “Casting down imaginations”—and, if we only knew all the truth, we should discover that a great deal of it is imagination; it is not real. We should find that, after all, that was not meant, that was not the implication at all; it was our imagination—it was how it came to us and our imagination got busy on it. And we are put out! Clever manoeuvre of the enemy! The counter to that is found in our passage: “our warfare... casting down imaginations... and bringing every thought into captivity to... Christ”. Do it now! Lay hold of those thoughts that have done you injury and perhaps done someone else injury. Lay hold of them! They will make you unfit for battle; they will affect the whole issue; they will touch others in the Army. There is a great deal of Scripture behind that, if we like to call it up. Lay hold of those thoughts 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 at any rate 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” (Rom. 12:3a). What ought you to think of yourself, what ought I to think of myself? In the light of God’s grace, of God’s mercy, of God’s love, in the light of God’s holiness, what ought we to think of ourselves? “...Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but”, continues Paul, “so to think as to think soberly, *according as* God hath dealt to each man a *measure of faith*” (vs. 3b); that is, if we may take another word of Paul’s out of its context, “*according to the measure* of the gift of Christ” (Eph. 4:7). The measure of our self-esteem will be in inverse proportion to the measure of Christ that we have. How much of Christ have we received? Well, if we have a superabundance 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, the less we shall want to talk about ourselves, the less we shall be in view, the less we shall want to be in the limelight.

“Every man... not to think of himself more highly...”. What ravages such a wrong mentality could make in an Army! Just imagine what would happen if men behaved like that —thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think, ‘throwing their weight about’, as we say. No, that will not do; that is only playing into the hands of the enemy. Our safety lies in ‘thinking soberly’, according as each of us has received of the measure of Christ. In this great battle, it matters greatly what kind of mind we have. “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” In an earlier chapter we have urged that every one should realize that, in a related way, the army depends upon the units: that the whole can suffer through the weakness of the individual. Thus it works both ways. We can overestimate our personal importance, or we can underestimate our related significance. To think of ourselves as we ought to think will mean that we do not err in either direction: we shall recognize that it *does* matter about us, but that it matters relatively, and not just personally—that is, independently.