



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

The Christian Life - A Warfare

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in 1955.

The fourth chapter of the gospel by Luke, the gospel by Luke, chapter 4:

"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil. And he did eat nothing in those days: and when they were completed, he hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command this stone that it become a loaf. And Jesus answered unto him, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And he led him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, To thee will I give all this authority, and the glory of them: for it hath been delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, it shall all be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he led him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, to guard thee: and, On their hands they shall bear thee up, Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. When the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season."

In the letter to Timothy, the first letter, chapter 1 and verse 18:

"This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that by them thou mayest war a good warfare."

Chapter 6, verse 12:

"Fight the good fight of the faith."

And in the second letter, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4:

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier."

It is not necessary to inform you that the Christian life is a warfare, but it is a matter concerning which we need to have a realisation. There is a great deal of difference between knowing a thing by way of information and *realising* what that thing really means. It is a matter, therefore, for our remembrance and for our realisation, that the Christian life is a warfare. Moreover, the New Testament makes it perfectly clear that this warfare is an age-long thing; it goes right on to the end of the age. It is shown right through the New Testament to be such, and the New Testament points on to the very end of this age, and shows that it is characterised by spiritual warfare all the way through.

Now, the enemy, with whom we have to contend, has a very elaborate and comprehensive and detailed tactical plan for getting his advantage. And one of the major tactics of the enemy is to eliminate from Christians the very element of warfare itself. That is, to make Christians non-warring people; really to take the element of warfare out of them, or in some way to bring them to a state where that is completely eliminated. There are far more spiritual casualties by *not* fighting than there are by fighting. There are many who get bruised and wounded, and knocked down temporarily in the fight, and they may be casualties for the time being, but they get up and fight again. But the very land is strewn with casualties who are casualties because they didn't fight; and I say there are many more such.

To change the metaphor; I was impressed again yesterday, as I have very often been when flying, with this fact: that when the plane is climbing, and when it is at its altitude, and has all its power in action, it is most steady. It goes on steadily and meets the adverse forces in a triumphant way. But immediately the plane is thrown into the descending position and the acceleration is retarded, and the power is reduced the thing becomes the plaything of the wind. You rock about and are shaken all over the place, because this driving force has been lessened. And it is very like that - we become the playthings of the devil; we get knocked all over the place; yes, we become casualties when we cease to be positive, or when something of the fighting, warring spirit is reduced in us. That is the perilous moment in the Christian life. And I repeat that the *warring spirit* in a Christian is a great protection, and to be without it is a great peril. If we let go fighting, satan will do the same, but he will get us in other ways.

Of course, that's the temptation: we would not be so positive if we could have an easier time, in a way, from the enemy. He will let down if we do in that particular form, but he will work in quieter and more subtle ways, and catch us; he is not giving us up. If you want to have an *easier* time, and yet a no less perilous time, stop fighting the devil! You will find that he will follow suit. But it is, as I say, the peril of becoming a casualty of not fighting.

If we go to Christ's temptations, these three temptations of which we have just read, we note that the line was crossed at Jordan, the battle was set and begun when He committed Himself to the Cross, as symbolized in the Jordan. And when the anointing Spirit came upon Him, that was the beginning of the battle.

Now note the nature of the warfare, as indicated by those temptations. First of all, the attack, the assault was upon:

His Relationship with the Father.

"If thou be the Son..." His relationship to the Father. The whole question of 'sonship' - that's an objective of satanic assault. You notice how the end of the account is given, "Then the devil leaveth Him..." our version says: "*for a season*", but the margin says: "*until a season*". He is coming back on that again and he did come back on that, right at the end. At the hour of greatest weakness, he came right back on that again: the whole question of His relationship with the Father. I have no time this morning to speak about what that relationship really means, of Son to the Father, but I can just indicate this, that 'sonship', by its very meaning, the very meaning of the word means that the whole honour of the Father is involved. True sonship means the taking up of the honour of the father. The most terrible thing about failure in sonship, whether it be in Christ or in the ordinary relations of life, is that it dishonours the father; it brings reproach upon the father; it is shame heaped upon the father - the father suffers shame by the failure of the son. And so it was with Christ - the whole matter of the Father's honour and the Father's satisfaction was involved, and so the enemy focused his assault, in the first place, on that: the relationship with the Father. Remember that is always the nature of the warfare, of this warfare. You know it well, our relationship with God is a focal point of constant attack and assault by the enemy, and it will be to the end, because so much is at stake and bound up with that relationship. The enemy is *always* trying to drive a wedge between us and the Father.

And then, in the next place:

Relationship to the World.

Relationship to the world, offering Him the kingdoms of the world, the glory and the authority, on his terms, satan's terms. And so it became a question as to whether Christ would let go this world as it is, and all that it had to offer, all that it had to offer of position, of rewards, of influence, and everything that this world could offer Him; whether He would let that go, in its present form, to have it only on God's terms, and to win it in God's way. You can see that that is a very real issue in spiritual warfare, especially for young Christians. You come up against that at once, immediately almost, you become a Christian, you are up against this: now then, the world, or the Lord? Whether you are going to have the world, or whether you are going to have the Lord. It very often becomes a very clearly divided question when you become a Christian, and you are right up against that. In very many practical ways that presses, it presses and becomes a warfare right on to the end. It is never, to the end of our lives, a pleasant thing... a pleasant thing to our natures, to be shunned by the world, discounted by the world, and to have the world holding back its favour and its prizes, because... because we are Christians. It has got to be settled; it comes into the battle.

You see how hurriedly I'm passing over these things, only hinting at them... and then, in the third place, the battle was focussed upon:

The Relationship with the Church.

"*He took Him to the pinnacle of the temple*". The *temple*... why didn't he take Him to the palace? Well, that is the world; that is in another realm, or to some other place? No, it is to the temple. The Lord Jesus had come with the object of securing His church. And here is the issue: it is a religious one now! It's a religious one; not the world now, it is a religious one; it's not God now, immediately. This is something else, and here you have, represented by the temple, the popular religion; the established religion, the traditional religion, the formal religion - yes, and the *dead religion* (but the devil doesn't say so). And now the suggestion is made that He can *capture* the religious world if only He will do this thing, He can capture the religious world and a *place* in the religious world, He can capture a reputation; He can capture influence in *that* world; He can make a name for Himself in that

world; He can get applause in that world, acceptance and a following in the religious world. But Jesus always in His life drew a distinct line between *traditional, cold, dead, formal religion*, and the living church. He committed Himself to the church; He said: "I will build My church"; "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it". Now the devil *knows*... he has a keen, keen sense of things; he has an intuitive knowledge of things; he knows what that church is destined to mean in his undoing. And so, if he could just turn Christ away from that specific object of the church on to something religious, as an alternative, he has scored a tremendous victory! The relationship to the church; no Christ is not being put off that, and don't forget dear friends, the enemy is always trying to get us to accept something that is less than God's *full thought* concerning the church: to be religious, to become, yes, formal, professional Christians; to drop down on to *that* level, and to be robbed, deprived of the *tremendous significance of the Body of Christ* and its *destiny* in the counsels of God.

Again, I hint at this, but I want to come to another threefold application of this. But these are three realms of the battle: in our relationship to God, our relationship to this world, and our relationship to the church - the battle rages on those three points. You have got to fight it through.

But then look as to Christ personally, in Himself. First:

His Body.

The attack upon His body, and what seemed to be its claimant need. And there is a direction, dear friends, in which the great issue arises in the very bodily realm: whether the dictates of our bodily, I say our physical life, are going to be paramount, or whether the will of God is going to be paramount. Sometimes that issue arises. That is why the apostle says: "I beseech you to present your *bodies* a living sacrifice." Your bodies a living sacrifice... because so often the body is the thing that rises up and dictates our course; what we need for our very physical life, it seems what is demanded; what is 'good for us' bodily, physically. Sometimes it is a matter of the point of rest. Oh yes, these bodies need rest, and God knows that. And Christ took account of that with His disciples, and He knew the need of physical rest. But there are points, I say, and times when this whole question has got to become a spiritual one, and not just a bodily one; where some physical weakness or some indisposition can become the dictating thing, and we lie down under it, accept it, and are put out of the battle. Whereas, even then at times, not always, but at times, we are called upon to say: "Yes, I don't feel very fit, I don't feel very well; the body seems to say I ought to do this, that, and the other, *but* there is some spiritual issue at question, and therefore I *lay hold on Life*." I lay hold on Life! And it's so often, is it not true, that when we stand on our feet, and gird ourselves to that very physical battle, the Life comes in, and we do what we would not have done if we had given way to the body. You see the point; it was a question then, at *that* time, as to whether the body was going to dictate or the Spirit, or the Lord, the Father.

The realm of the body... then, in the realm of:

The Soul.

As I pointed out, this offering of the kingdoms of the world, was an appeal to His soul. Ambition! Ambition... oh the terrible tragedies of ambitiousness in this world! Parent's for their children... parent's ambition for their children has so often devastated the spiritual life of children. And *our* ambition in this world to get somewhere; to get to the top of the ladder, to be something, to make a name, and every other form of our own '*natural*' life, our selfhood. And this was an appeal to selfhood, you see, selfhood in this world - reputation, name, position, influence, fame, success, prosperity, getting on - all that was involved in this. Well, there is nothing wrong, nothing wrong with

doing a good job of work in this world, and of getting on, but if it is at the cost of doing the Father's will, and if it is at the suggestion of the devil, and the drawing out of our own soul or self-life, there is an *infinite peril* bound up with that and we have got to fight this thing out; get really to this and fight out this issue. What is it that really is dictating? Is it my own selfhood? Is it my own soul, or really is that all subject to what God wants for my life? And that is very often a very keen battle, isn't it?

And then as to His Spirit... His Body, His Soul,

His Spirit.

The whole question of worship governs this whole temptation doesn't it? Worship, in spirit... the spirit is that part of us where God gets worship. "God seeketh true worshippers who worship Him *in spirit*", not the body, not the soul, but the spirit. Paul said: "Whom I serve *in my spirit*". The enemy will do anything to get us off the ground of that *essential* and *ultimate* relationship with God in our spirit; *anything* to draw us away from that. You and I have got to learn more and more, keenly and clearly, what it means to *walk in the spirit*, and to have our life with God by our spirits - not by our feelings, our emotions, our own desires, our own reasonings, and not by the governing influences of this world at all; *but with God*, in the innermost part of our being with God.

Now, you see how from that very moment that was a primary issue in the life of the Lord Jesus Himself. All the way through, from this committal at Jordan, and from this battle, this fundamental and inclusive battle in the wilderness, His life was based upon this: Would He be influenced by other considerations, or would He walk with the Father in an internal way, in His heart? See how that arose again and again; the enemy was trying to cut in *there*, to get His life upon some other basis than upon the basis of His inner fellowship with the Father. Much could be said could it not... what we realise about the battle that rages there to get us off this ground.

But all this raises one big question: what is going to prevail? The enemy comes along physical lines, he comes along emotional lines, he comes in all these different ways, but there is one issue in it all. It is a battle: who is going to prevail, and what is going to prevail? The Lord Jesus came back every time to the devil with what the Father had made known as to His will. After all "*It is written*". He was saying in other words: "God has said..." "God has said..." "God has said!" "I know what God has said." And that's the thing, that is the final word in this battle. That's the argument; not the argument even of my physical needs and conditions; not the argument of my well-being in this world at all; *but... the argument of my inward life with God*. That's the battle ground!