

Supplement #2 to Message Delivered on OBW, November 3, 2021

Specific Contemporary Sins That Call for Repentance

What are my Weapons and Strategy?

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. (Ephesians 6:13-19 KJV 1900)

In the last article, I dealt with the error of choosing the wrong enemy to fight in our spiritual warfare. If we have chosen the wrong enemy to fight, it is highly likely that we also chose the wrong weapons and strategy in that fight. If we have so ignored the directions of our “Commander,” the Lord Himself, surely we need to acknowledge, confront, and repent of that errant conduct. We are soldiers in His army. As such, we are obligated to seek, hear, and obey His directions, not ignore them and fight our private wars.

Wrong Strategy

In the last study that emphasized knowing and fighting the right adversary, we noted that “*high places*” in Ephesians 6:12 was translated from the same Greek word as “*heavenly places*” in Ephesians 1:3, 20, 2:6, and 3:10. We also noted Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6. In that passage, Paul reminds us again that our weapons are never to be carnal, created or fed by our human nature, but “*...mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.*” (2 Corinthians 10:4) In the next verse, Paul identified specific “*strongholds*” against which we are to do battle. The first such stronghold he named is “*Casting down imaginations.*” We can only know and confront or resist our own personal imaginations, and we are successful in controlling our imaginations only by this New Testament spiritual strategy and weapons.

What is it about our imagination that needs to be confronted and defeated in our spiritual warfare? How does imagination work? We start thinking about something we especially dislike and we often imagine bad things about those things or people. In today’s world, anyone with a tablet, cell phone, or desktop computer can search for information regarding any question or topic imaginable. And find any description or conclusion you wish to support, further feeding your imagination. Think your object is black, and you can find information from people who agree. Think your object is white, and you can find just as many people who agree. Both people write prolifically and convincingly on the internet about their ideas. Whatever you think, you can claim one or the other as your source for your “Facts” that confirm your imagination.

But how reliable is internet information? In the mid-1990s, I completed a Masters Degree in Christian Apologetics at BIOLA University. In one semester the evening offerings did not include any class that I

needed for my degree, so my advisor and also the dean of Apologetics, suggested a “Directed Study.” He and I would find a subject that he approved, and I would research that subject and write a research paper on it which he would grade. In my first draft of the research paper, I included a reference to a New Testament Greek word definition, citing the popular Strong’s Dictionary as my source. When my advisor reviewed the draft to give me pointers for my final copy, he put a large red check in the margin by that reference. When he talked to me about the paper, he said, “Joe, if you want your research to be taken seriously, never use Strong as a source.” While Strong’s Dictionary of New Testament words may be popular with many Christians, it holds no credibility with New Testament Greek language scholars.

I offer a similar observation regarding claiming an internet source as our “authority” for any topic our imagination may care to explore. If you are researching a medical question, say COVID, you should look for studies conducted by a large and respected medical research institution, Johns Hopkins, Mayo Clinic, Cedar-Sinai, or Scripps, not an internet piece written by one person, whatever that person’s background may be. It is only that person’s opinion, not backed by authentic research. Thus, for a believer to embrace an entrenched belief about this question, *pro or con matters not*, to cite an internet source puts that believer in the same not-credible and not to be taken seriously posture as I put myself in the research paper. Often very sincere Christian people compromise their credibility by reacting to these sources as if every word they read from their internet source is “Fact.”

The serious believer in God has a far more fruitful field of study, meditation, and conversation than imaginations based on such questionable sources. Godly and wise “Spiritual strategies” will confront such imaginations and cast them down, *replaced in our minds by God and His rich Word in Scripture. “Think on these things.”* (Philippians 4:8)

Wrong Weapons

During the COVID isolation, most of my exposure to other believers was on social media, texting, e-mails, or rare “Social distancing” visits. We often demonstrated our frustration at the problem, but we seldom manifested a wise, spiritual use of the right, the Biblical, armor in our battle strategy. To the extent we engaged the wrong enemy, used the wrong strategy, or failed to use the Biblical weapons as our Commander directed—if we are to regain robust spiritual health and to overcome our adversary—we must start a new path of living, and the “Gate” of entrance into this path is that marvelous healing thing that Scripture calls “Repentance.” We need to repent of our errors in these thoughts and actions, confess them to the Lord, confess them to our brother and sister fellow-soldiers if our conduct harmed them, and begin a new way of living, and a new way of confronting our true, Biblical adversary, the “*Enemy within.*”

What are the specific weapons that Paul named in this lesson to be used by the faithful believer in our spiritual battle against the correct adversary in the battlefield of our mind and imagination? Paul names them and points us to their proper use.

1. “...joins girt about with truth.” A Roman soldier of the first century wore armament around his waist that protected his mid-section from injury by the adversary. To be effective soldiers for Jesus, we must start with Jesus Himself, who said, “*I am...the truth.*” (John 14:6) We must build on that “Truth

foundation” with rightly interpreted, not strained and wrested interpretations of Scripture. (2 Peter 3:16) When we interpret a Scripture correctly, we need not strain and imagine its meaning or application in our lives.

*Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a **plain path**, because of mine enemies.* (Psalm 27:11 KJV; emphasis added)

2. “**...and having on the breastplate of righteousness.**” Satan knows us far better than we’d like. In adversarial conflict, he knows just when and how to remind us of our own failures and shortcomings, our sins. Our only effective military strategy is to live our faith so that he can’t hurl anything we’ve done against us. Can we perfectly reach this high mark? No, but we should strive to our highest and best efforts to do so.

3. “**And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.**” Although we engage the adversary in a spiritual battle, our lifestyle and “Walking” strategy is to be one of peace. With the exception of the sword, every armament named in this lesson is primarily defensive. Biblical spiritual warfare is more often defensive than offensive.

4. “**Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.**” An effective strategy in ancient warfare involved shooting fire-carrying arrows at your enemies. The arrow pierces anything flammable, starts a fire, and creates distraction and defeat. The shield was made to withstand those fire-arrows. What is our shield? Faith is highly effective in our spiritual conflict within.

5. “**And take the helmet of salvation.**” Head protection was/is essential to protect the soldier and his ability to fight. It is no less essential for believers in the army of Jesus. A mindless soldier is a weak soldier. What are we to take to protect our “Minds” from our adversary? “*...the helmet of salvation,*” not the helmet of expert knowledge of the adversary and his strategies. In public media during the Pandemic, how many posts did we see from Christian people that talked about “Them” and what they were doing? And how much posting did we read reminding us of the “Captain of our salvation”? One strategy works effectively, the other doesn’t work at all.

6. “**and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**” How well do we know our Bible? During the “Shut-down” era of the Pandemic, we had an abundance of “Down time” that we did not normally enjoy. How did we spend it? Did we turn more frequently to our Bibles and immerse our minds in its teachings? Or did we flood our minds with pity parties or angry fuming about “Them” and what they were doing to us?

7. “**Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit.**” We could presumably wear all our armor, but failure to tie it all together, and to seek, hear, and learn directions from our Commander in prayer renders us ineffective soldiers for Jesus.

8. “**and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.**” A wise and effective soldier always knows the location and activity of his fellow-soldiers. Send a “Rambo” “I’ll fight the whole battle myself” soldier to fight, and you lose the battle; you don’t win it. Faithfully abiding in our warfare, perseverance and supplication (earnest intense prayer) go hand in hand in this battle strategy.

Each item of armor that Paul listed and described lends itself wisely and logically to a spiritual warfare, engaged and fought, won, or lost on the battlefield of our individual minds. It doesn't at all match a military engagement with a "Flesh and blood" adversary. In fact, it doesn't seem sensible against such an enemy.

To the extent, during the COVID Pandemic or any time for that matter, we either ignore, neglect, or misuse this armor in our personal "Battle of the mind" against our adversary who works in our minds to overcome us, we ensure our defeat in the battle.

Reflecting on my personal journey of the last two years, I worked to keep my focus and strategies in Scripture, but I must also confront seasons when I thought and followed the wrong strategy and used the wrong weapons against the wrong enemy. For that I need to work at true, "**...not to be repented of**" Biblical repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:10. This lesson emphasizes our internal spiritual battle, not any external conflict. Verses 5-7 emphasize our internal battle. For example, whose thoughts can you control and bring "**...to the obedience of Christ**"? Only your own, no one else's) Let's all meet at the feet of Jesus, our one Commander, and the Captain of our salvation, confess our failures, our sins, to Him, seek His forgiveness and healing, and faithfully work to begin a new and Biblical war against our real adversary within.

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