

MARRIAGE: LIKE WARFARE

“If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.”

– Eccl. 4:12 –

How closely does marriage resemble warfare! Sure it is like a garden (you must daily be tending to it, clearing weeds, removing rocks, watering, *etc.*); certain it is like labor (you must be disciplined and diligent); but what better to liken this union to than *warfare*? This holy calling stretches the sinews, strengthens the muscles, and breaks the heart. Every act of valor on this tremendous field, is worthy of the noblest badges, and the greatest esteem. And what act so noble, sure to win that Medal of Honor from our Great Captain, but to lay your life down for the other? You have been divinely charged with clear lines of authority, which you dare not transgress – one is a general and the other a private. The day you enlist in this warfare you dissolve into the commands and desires of another; and then, in a very tangible way, you may say, “Not my will, but thine be done.” To fulfill this calling will certainly take all of you. You will have long nights, early mornings, and days of blood, sweat and tears, as you bear one another across this blood-rent arena. And, at last, by the blessing and aid of Almighty God, you shall win the victor’s crown!

To say that marriage is like a war, I do not mean a *civil war*. Too often this is the case. One feels hindered by the other, or one feels slighted, and thus the war of desires begins, and if not quelled with all swiftness and energy, the outcome will be a dismal scene of jaded love and affections. There must be, firstly, in the hearts of you both, a united heart – a single cause. Your enemy must be clearly seen. The hill you are to reclaim must have all your desire. You must move as one man.

Your enemy is the devil! The devil, beloved, he is your adversary. Advance against him with a holy vengeance as he has so often advanced (and succeeded) against you. When you bow your knees in prayer, remember that, though he so often succeeded in thrusting at you, yet now you are not alone. God has given you an armor bearer to slay behind you. Fight often against him, and remember his schemes, remember how he seeks to get inside you, and divide you from each other. Beware lest he find you off your guard, and so confuse you that you be found to turn your swords upon each another. O! let it never be once named among yourselves.

The hill your are seeking to reclaim must be in your hearts, as the exile from his mother country feels the place in his heart, remembers the brooks, the markings in the woods, the feel of the sod between his fingers, and so has a profound sense of the land even when long removed from it. You must feel in your hearts that you are not aliens to what you are contending for, but are rightly entitled to it as joint-heirs with him who is Heir of all things. The both of you must feel the promises given in your covenant to be your heartfelt homestead, and a home sickness should fill the both of you when away from that comfortable place. And so as a native, and not a mercenary, you have that hill for which you both contend deep in the affections of your heart. How this will bind the two of you together in indissoluble bonds, only eternity will tell!

You must move as one man. “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). You are no longer two separate persons, but one. One heart, one soul, one mind, and one flesh. How God fashions a man and a woman together in such a way, indeed, is “a great mystery”; nevertheless, it is so. And we know that this is right and good: for a man to so leave his father and mother, and to cleave unto his wife, that who he was in independence is forgotten in the blessed unity given by God in marriage. He no longer is his own man, and she is no longer her own woman, but the two are one. Their desires and hopes, dreams and wishes are to be shared or sacrificed, lest any sly fox creep in and spoil the ever-tender vine of *love*. This is a delight to the soul who has already lost themselves in complete surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, for Christ is in you, and is also in your spouse, and can Christ be divided? the very thought is a knife to the heart! And so for you this will be a blessed duty.

Secondly, love is of such a nature that if it will continue, it must be maintained by a fight. As faith must ever be laid hold of with a violence, or never to be laid hold of at all, so is love. We are to earnestly contend for the faith, for the devil is earnestly contending against it, and so it is with love. These gifts of God are just that, they are *of God*, and thus we should take every precaution to nurture them and to ever keep up an environment where they may thrive. Love is a precious gift of God – the most precious gift. If you have this gift, it is proof that you have faith, but if you want this, than you are a liar or deceived to believe you have faith. A war you must wage day-by-day if ever you are to keep on the offence against the chief adversary of your marriage, is the war of love. This is to say, you must ever be guarding against the attacks of the devil, those fiery darts, which he will daily be sending upon you. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). God showed in the garden, when he cursed Adam, that man may not expect to receive something for nothing, though it be a most free and unalienable gift. If love will ever be kept, it must be tended to. A man would be a fool to plant an orchard and expect proper apples to be brought forth without a close attention, pruning, and care being given to the trees; likewise, to expect the blessing of fervent love, yea deepening love, without a close watch and concern for the same, is folly.

Thirdly, love is worth fighting for. Not only for the comforts and benefits such a happy state furnishes in the home, but for the spiritual blessings which are abundantly provided when this love is abounding. Few men in our day experience the former, and even fewer the latter. The comforts and benefits are many, and they are sweet to the taste. As a medicine to a sick body, so have the comforts of a home, wherein love flourished, brought healing to many a weary and wounded heart. What a balm is this? Both healing to the body and to the soul in one simple remedy: love. When this is running low, you need not go far to discover the cause of your anxiety, lust, intemperance, irritability, or whatever other common ailment may arise; fix this, and you shall have peace. No worry if the home is dirty, and dinner is not made (or ever made), if your wife smiles upon you with the fire of love burning in her heart, all is made up for.

When God is pleased with us he often shows us by causing us to *feel* that he is pleased. And what is more pleasing to the Father of all saints, than to see two of his own in a bond of perfect, fervent love? There is nothing so pleasing to Almighty God than to know that there is unity and love among his saints. Where God sees this he *commands* his

blessing. Psalm 133 – “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” It is when God sees this love that he commands his blessing of life, and it is when you lose this, that God begins shutting up the blessings of his hand against you. Peter says, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (I Pet. 3:7). How terrible to be given such an advantage – “heirs together of the grace of life” – and yet to be hindered in the presence of God from laying hold of that which you have right to, because love was waning. What grace is there laid up for the marriage that is dwelling together in kind regard, warm affection, forgiveness, and tenderness! Yea, a double blessing! If you wish to have power with God, husbands love your wives, and wives see that ye reverence your husbands. Then shall God open a fount of blessing upon you that all hell will tremble to behold. I am sure at the time when the very shadow of Peter was healing those upon whom it fell, he was showing piety first at home, in loving his wife. And these blessings, both physical and spiritual, ought to be fought for.

With this warfare now properly exalted before you, I want to open before your eyes, last of all, the weaponry and the armour with which you have been fitted, or the means of grace God has provided, whereby you may “war a good warfare”. “Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges” (I Cor. 9:7)? Paul argues the point that God has fitted him and equipped him with all necessary items for the work of his ministry, and so may you who are setting out upon this great campaign of love. God is your Commander and Chief, and never has he sent forth his armies into the field in their own strength, and in the power of their own might, for he knows they have so little. But on the contrary, he says to you, with the utmost confidence in Himself, “Be strong in *the Lord* and in the power of *his* might” (Eph. 6:10). He has ever commanded his soldiers so, and of all who have trusted in him, not one has been confounded. You may be sure if God has *begun* this good work he will also *perform* it until the day of Jesus Christ. He has called himself the Author and the Finisher of faith – that great work of his – and he has also proven himself to be the Author of this marriage, has he not? And if so, than you may cast yourself upon it, that he *shall be* the Finisher. He must be the first and the last rung on your ladder to heaven, and everything in between. Look to him often, and he will give you new supplies to meet your ever increasing needs, he will not leave you comfortless if you are trusting in him for all of your comfort.

And whatever battle you may find yourself engaged in, though you feel as though the devil has taken away your banner (that banner of love), remember that you are not alone. The end of that scripture above is, “And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” And this is what you have been given! It is not merely the two of you, no, you must remember there are three of you. When the wicked king threw those three God-fearing Jews into the furnace of fire, he was amazed when he saw *four* loose, walking in the midst of the fire, without any hurt, and the form of the fourth like the Son of God. And so shall it be with you as you follow your Lord into the battle, though Satan seem to take the field,

and take the higher ground, though it seems you have been thrust sore, so as to rise no more, wait! for ere long the Third Strand in your cord shall appear, and you shall be helped. In a typical war if one is prevailed against, then two shall withstand him, for there is strength in numbers, but not so in the battle we wage, *“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”* (Eph. 6:12). You are too weak, even the two of you together, to wage this warfare, but he who has joined the two of you together has also pledged himself and all of his all-mighty power to help you. You must only look to him. In every battle that may arise, pray thus, “Our Father, you have given us to one another, and still we have not the strength of ourselves to face our foe – he is too mighty for us! But, thou, O Lord, art Almighty, and thou hast promised to strengthen that which thou hast wrought for us. We pray thee for life and strength, courage and help, but Lord, most of all, we ask, and wait expectantly for *love*. In Jesus’ name, Amen!”