

Consider Before You Fight

A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon

"What king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace." Luke 14:31,32

Every sensible man endeavors to adapt his purpose to his strength. He does not begin to build a house which he will not be able to finish nor commence a war which he cannot hope to fight all the way through. The religion of Christ is the most reasonable one in the world, and Jesus Christ never desires to have any disciples who shall blindly follow him without counting the cost.

We always esteem it to be a happy thing when we can get men to sit down and consider. The majority of you are so full of other thoughts, so occupied with the world, ever running hither and thither about your ordinary business, that we cannot get you to think or calmly sit down and soberly look at things in the light of eternity and weigh them deliberately as you ought. And yet it is only reasonable that the Master should ask of you to do for him, with regard to your own spiritual matters, what you will admit that every sensible man does in his business continually. You are poor traders if you never have any stock-takings; you are likely, before long, to be in bankruptcy court if there is no periodic examination of accounts. And so Christ would have you sit down and take stock as to where you are, and what you are, and then to figure up by some sort of arithmetic, by which you are able to come to a truthful calculation, what you are able to do and what not to do, and what therefore it is reasonable for you to undertake and what is unreasonable, and where your position ought and ought not to be.

I especially invite you who are unconverted to some few thoughts upon the war in which you are engaged with God, hoping that if you consider a little upon it, you will send a delegation and desire peace. If you cannot look up to God and say, "My Father," and feel that your heart beats true to him, then remember it is a fact that you are his enemy. If you could have what you wish, there would be no God. If it were in your power, you would never trouble yourself again with thoughts of him. You would like to live as you want, and I know how you would want to live. It would be any way rather than as God commands. Now, as you are engaged in antagonism with him, just think for a moment: Can you expect to succeed? Are you likely to win the day? You have entered into a conflict with his law--you do not intend to keep it; with his day--you do not regard it. You are thus at war with God. Now, is it likely that you will be successful? Is there a chance for you? If so, then perhaps it may be as well to go on. If you can conquer him, if the battlements of glory may yet see the flag of sin waved triumphant there, why, man, then try it. You will have at least an ambition worthy of Satan, who desired sooner to reign in hell than to be ruled by heaven. But is there any hope for you? Let me put a few things before you which may, perhaps, make you think the conflict too unequal and thus lead you to abandon the thought at once.

Think of God's stupendous power! What is there that he cannot do? We see but little of God's power comparatively in our land. Now and then there comes a crash of thunder in a storm, and we look up with amazement when he sets the heavens on a blaze with his lightning. But go and do business on the deep waters. Let your vessel fly before the howling hurricane. Mark how every staunch timber seems to crack as though it were but matchstick. Watch how the steady mast goes by the board, snaps, and is broken to shivers. Mark what God does when he stirs up the great deep and seems to bring heaven down and lifts the earth up till the elements mingle in a common mass of tempest.

Go to the Alps and listen to the thunder of an avalanche. Stand amazed as you look down some grim precipice or peer with awe-struck wonder into the blue mysteries of a crevasse. See the leaping cataracts and mark those frozen seas, the glaciers, as they come sweeping down the mountainside. Stay awhile till a storm shall gather there, and Alp shall talk to Alp, and those white prophetic heads shall seem to bow while the wings of tempest cover them! There you may learn something of the power of God amidst the crash of nature. Or, if you could have stood by the side of Dr. Woolfe, when rising early one morning he went out of Aleppo, and upon turning his head saw that Aleppo was no more (it having been in a single moment swallowed up by an earthquake), then you might see what God can do.

But why need I feebly recapitulate what you all know so well? Think of what that Book records of his deeds of prowess, when he unloosed the depths and bade the fountains of the great deep be broken up that the whole world that then was might be covered with water. Let such names as Og, the king of Bashan, and Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Sennacherib the mighty, rise before your recollection and mark what God has done. Who has ever dashed upon the bosses of his buckler without being wounded? What iron has he not broken? What spear has he not shivered? Millions came against him, but by the blast of the breath of his nostrils they fell, or they flew like the chaff before the wind. Let the sea roar and the fulness thereof, but the rocks still stand and hurl off the waves in flakes of foam. And so does God when his foes are most enraged and passionate. He that sits in the heavens laughs. He breaks them in pieces without a stroke of his hand or even the glance of his eye.

Think, sinner. Think of him with whom you are contending. Have you an arm like God's? Can you thunder with a voice like his? Can you stamp with your foot and shake the mountains? Can you touch the hills and make them smoke? Can you say to the sea, "Be stirred to your depths," or call to the winds and bid the steeds of tempest be unloosed? If you cannot, then think of the battle! Attempt to do no more but hurry back to your bed and there commune with your heart and make your peace with him against whom you cannot hope successfully to contend.

Think again, O rebellious man. ***You have to deal not only with almighty power, but with an ever encompassing power.*** Please think how much you are in God's power today as it regards your temporal position. You are prospering in business; but the tide of prosperity may be turned in a way unknown to you. God has a thousand ways of stripping those whom he before seemed to clothe most lavishly. You dote upon that wife of yours; she may be smitten before your eyes and wasted with consumption, or more rapidly still, she may be taken from you at a stroke. Then where is your joy? Those children, those happy

prattlers who make you glad. Could you hold them for a moment if God should call back their spirits? If he said, "Return you children of men," [then] your prayers, the physician, your love--what could all these avail you? You have but to buy the coffin and the grave and bury your dead out of your sight. God can sweep away all, if he will, and leave you penniless, childless, a widower, without comfort in the world. I would not contend with him who has so many ways to wound me. I am vulnerable at so many points, and he knows how to pierce me to the quick in them all. I will, therefore, make him my friend rather than my foe. I had better not strive with him who can storm every position along my bastion whenever he shall please.

Think how much you are personally in his hand! You are strong, you say. You will do a day's work with any man. There are few, perhaps, who can lift a load more readily than you; and yet one second would be enough to paralyze every limb. Your faculties are clear; you can write with perspicuity. No one can see through an intricate account more readily than you can, or find out a secret more speedily. And yet one tick of the clock is time enough to reduce either you or me to a driveling idiot or a raving madman. Not many yards from here there stands in Bedlam an awful proof of what the Providence of God can do in one moment with those who seemed the most sane, the most witty, and the most able of men. You have not to go far in either direction until, at the gate of some hospital, you will find how soon the body may become very, very low, even to the dust if God but will it. I would not, O sinner, I would not have God other than my friend while I am thus helplessly in his control. If the moth is in my hand, and I can crush it at my will and pleasure. Surely, if that moth had wit and sense, it would not provoke me to anger nor seek to bring down my plagues upon it. If it could, it would seek to nestle near my heart so that I, who am so able to crush it, might use my power for its protection, and might make what wit I have to be its wisdom for its shelter and defense.

It is well also *to remember the mighty army of the Lord of Hosts*, and that you live amidst the creatures of God who all are ready to do his bidding. As the children of Israel journeyed in the wilderness, they were preserved by God from many foes and innumerable dangers which lurked around waiting to destroy them. Once God gave the fiery serpents permission to assault the host, and what death and terror immediately filled the camp! Then they must have seen that it was no small thing to be at variance with God, when he had so many allies waiting to do his bidding.

How clearly this was shown in the plagues of Egypt when frogs, locusts, lice, hail and fire, plague and death flooded that ill-fated land, when beckoned on by the uplifted hand of God. He can still call to his aid the forces of creation. When Herod strove with God, he was smitten of worms and died; and God has still a countless army of servants who do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. You had better wait awhile and think how you can meet them. Are your friends as numerous? Can you muster an army like unto God's? Is the muster roll of your hosts like unto his? Consider the heavens. He marshals yon starry multitude and calls them all by name; and because he is great in strength, not one fails. Be wise and enter into covenant with him through blood, and rush not on to certain defeat by seeking to outrival God.

Remember, moreover, *what is the extent of God's wisdom*, and that his foolishness is

greater than your highest knowledge. A good general is worth more than a regiment of men. When Stonewall Jackson was killed, his enemies and friends alike felt that his death was more than the loss of ten thousand men. Our Iron Duke, when alive, was a strength to our army beyond all calculation. Now mark the skill and infinite wisdom of the God who leads the army of the skies. All light and knowledge are his. He is the Ancient of days, and his experience runs back to all eternity. You are but of yesterday and know nothing. His plans are beyond your conception, but he knows the way you take. He is far above your thoughts and ever out of your sight, but he can see you through-and-through, and knows you better than you know yourself. Do not show your folly by weighing your wisdom against his in the scales, or by expecting to outshine him so as to triumph over him. Poor moth rushing into the flame, you will be consumed amidst the pity of good men and the derision of evil ones.

There is yet another matter I want you to recollect, you who are the enemies of God. **You have a conscience.** You have not gotten rid of it yet. You have a thief in that candle of the Lord, it is true, but still it is alight. It is not put out, and God has ways of making it to become a terrible plague to you if you do not accept it as a friend. Conscience is meant to be man's armor-bearer, beneath whose shield he may fight the battles of the right. But if you make it your enemy, then conscience often places a sword in such a way as to cut and wound you severely.

You have a conscience, and that is a very awkward thing for a man to have who is an enemy of God. If I were God's enemy, I should prefer having no monitor to call my attention to the holy character and righteous law of the Most High. I should be glad to get rid of every particle of moral sense. But you have consciences, and most of you are not yet dead to all feeling of guilt and shame. You cannot, therefore, sin so cheaply as others. If for the present you do manage to put Mr. Conscience down, yet since he is still in you, the time will come when you will find his voice growing louder. There will be terror in that voice, which will make it a terror for you to sleep and hard for you to go about your daily business with your accustomed regularity. It will be so, unless you get your "conscience seared with a hot iron." If I had a friend of God inside my heart, I would not like to fight with God so long as he continued within me.

One last reflection. **Remember that you must die.** You must die, and, therefore, it is a pity to be at enmity with God. You may put it off and say, "I shall not die yet." But you do not know that. How can you tell? It is possible that you may die tomorrow. But suppose you live for the next twenty or thirty years. What is that? I am only some thirty years of age, and yet I confess that I never thought time so short as I feel it to be now. When we were children, we thought twelve months a great length of time. When we were twenty, a year seemed to be a very respectable period. But now it flies, and some of my friends here will tell you that whether it is fifty, sixty, or seventy years, it all seems but a mere dream, a snap of the finger, it is gone so soon. My dear friend, will it not be a very dreadful thing to die when you are at war with God?

Here is this, too, to think of. **There is a future state,** so that when you die you have to live again. We know very little about that next state. You are launched without your body, an unclothed spirit, into a world which you have never seen. Will you find companions

there or will you be alone? Where will it be? What sort of place will it be like? I should not choose to enter upon the realm of spirits without having God to be my friend, for it would be a dreadful thing to enter into that mysterious unknown country having nothing to take with me except an inveterate enmity to the King that reigns supreme in it. If I must cross the border and go into a land I have never trodden, I would like, at least, to carry a passport with me, or to be able to say, "I am a friend of the King that reigns here." But to go there as God's enemy--how terrible that must be!

Besides, let me say, you cannot hope to succeed. *All experience is against you.* There never was one yet that either in this state or the next has fought with God and conquered; and you will not be the first. They who contend with God all come to this one conclusion: "He comes forth in his strength, and his enemies are given like stubble to the fire, and like wax to the flame. He lifts up his voice and they melt away. He looks at them, and that one flash of fire withers them forever, and out of the bottomless pit of despair they weep and wail the piteous but useless regret that their harvest is past, and their summer is ended, and that they are not saved. For they have spent their strength against their God and so have brought themselves where ruin is eternal, and hope can never come." Oh, that you would send a delegation and be at peace!

I think I hear someone say, "Well, we wish to give up the contest, but what is to be done so as to be at peace with God?" I ask, "Have you got an ambassador to go to God for you?" That is the first thing. He cannot look at *you*. Jesus Christ is the Ambassador between God and man. Can you commit your case into his hand? Will you do so? If so, your case will speed well. God cannot deny Jesus any request. Jesus has a right to all he ever asks the Father to give, and the Father is always well pleased in him and delights to grant whatever he desires. That Savior is willing to plead your cause. He waits to be gracious. I am sent to tell you the good news of his love and mercy, to warn you of the certain doom that awaits all who turn from Christ, and to bid you and every sin-sick rebel to come at once, just as you are, to the footstool of mercy. I can pledge the honor of God (being Christ's ambassador for this purpose) that if you come he will in no wise cast you out. And the terms of peace are very brief. They are these: give up the traitors. There can be no peace between you and God while you harbor sin. Give them up and be willing to renounce every sin of every sort and kind, for one harbored traitor will prevent God from concluding peace with you.

Sinner, what do you say? Is it hard to give up your sin? Does that condition strike you as unreasonable? Out with the knife, man, and cut the throat of every iniquity. There is no sin for which it is worth your while to be damned. A little rioting, an hour or two of giddy amusements--is this a due recompense for an eternity of fire unmitigated by a drop of water? I pray, be reasonable. Barter not away your soul for trifles. Pawn not your eternity for the mere fictions of an instant. God give you grace not to kick at the condition, but at once to cast out your enemies and gods and then lay hold on Christ, on Jesus Christ alone, and let him stand as Ambassador for you. You cannot fight it out. Let peace be made. Oh, may it be made today through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son.

Next, confess that you deserve the King's wrath. Bow your head, put the rope about your neck as though you felt you deserved that the executioner should lead you forth. Pray to

God for pardon and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Then cling to the skirts of that appointed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who on yonder bloody tree made expiation for the sins of God's enemies, that they might thereby become God's friends. God demands of you a confession of your guilt. He will be honored by your humbling yourself before him. Your sin has aimed at his glory, and now he will glorify himself by your repentance. It would be only just on his part if he spurned you away and cast you out into the pit that has no bottom. But he has said that whoever confesses his sin shall obtain forgiveness. Go, therefore, in the spirit of the publican. Smite upon your breast and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Confess that you deserve hell, but ask for heaven. You shall not plead in vain. Only honor God's justice, and appeal to his mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. This, surely, is not too much for God to expect at your hands. If you will not submit, what can you say when God shall crush you? You refuse to bend the knee and bow the head now. What will you do when God shall trample on you in his fury and tread on you in his hot displeasure?

Therefore, you must, in this accepted time while it is still the day of mercy, seek his face and with weeping and supplication "take with you words, and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."