

Warfare (II): Against the Old Self (I)

I. The Greatest Enemy in Warfare—Old Self

1. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, Paul disciplines his body and keeps it under control

- ◆ Paul is not someone who lives life casually on the ground; he presses on toward the goal, striving to obtain Christ himself. And a very important thing is to discipline his body along the way and to keep it under control. Therefore, Paul deeply understands that his greatest enemy is himself.
- ◆ **In the original text, “discipline your body” means “boxing gloves hitting oneself until the whole body is bruised.”**
- ◆ *“Keep it under control”*: in the original text, it’s about treating the body as a slave, not being considerate of it or submitting to it.
- ◆ Paul treated himself in this way to prevent himself from being rejected after preaching the gospel to others.

II. The “Old Self” in the Bible.

1. Colossians 3:5, 9, “*what is earthly*” “*old self*”

- ◆ This “old self” is corrupted by deceitful desires and gradually becomes worse.

2. Romans 8:7-8, “*flesh*”

- ◆ ⁷ *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.”* ¹³ *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

3. Luke 9:23-24, the most frequently mentioned thing by Jesus—to “*deny oneself.*”

- ◆ When Jesus was on earth, He rarely spoke about how to deal with Satan directly. He mostly addressed this kind of demon by emphasizing the need for fasting and prayer to cast them out.
- ◆ *“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.”* The first life being the old self. If one cherishes this old self, they will surely lose eternal life.
- ◆ *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself.”* Jesus constantly spoke about this while on earth, but God’s children rarely pay attention because we often prefer to indulge, cherish, and protect our old selves. That’s why we experience so little of the abundant life of Jesus on earth as well as God’s power manifesting in us.

Our “old self” obstructs the flow of the Holy Spirit from flowing out of us. This “old self” is the greatest hindrance to God’s filling within us.

4. Galatians 5:19-20, “*works of the flesh.*”

- ◆ The discussion of “works of the flesh” actually refers to various manifestations of our “old self.”

5. James 1:15, “*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*”

- ◆ Desire is indeed the old self, naming the works of the flesh. If they are not dealt with, they gradually conceive and give birth to even greater aspects of self (giving birth to sin). When sin is full-grown, it leads to death.
- ◆ Many people will say, “It’s all Satan attacking me.” We often blame the devil, but many times, it’s actually our own desires. There is a big demon inside us humans, and that is our old self.

- ◆ The old self is the fortress of the devil in our hearts, the stronghold of the enemy, the most cunning and stubborn adversary that the Holy Spirit within us needs to combat.

All the works of the devil are within this “self.” It is the unique factory of the devil.

III. How to Deal with the “Old Self”

1. Galatians 5:16-17, *“Walk by the Spirit.”*

- ◆ *“[G]ratifying the desires of the flesh”*: gratifying means “fulfilling” in the original text. So, as long as we follow the Holy Spirit, we won’t fulfill the desires of the flesh. If the Holy Spirit moves you not to speak, you don’t speak. If it moves you to praise, you praise. Obedience helps us break free from our old selves.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit and our desires are at odds with each other, preventing us from doing what we want. Here it speaks to if you don’t obey the Holy Spirit and often gratify the desires of the flesh, you will be driven and bound by this old self, making you an unfree person.

For example, a person who cares too much about their reputation is often very unfree, living under the scrutiny and criticism of others.

So, do you want true freedom?

Here it says that you have to walk according to the Holy Spirit in order to attain genuine freedom.

- ◆ We often fail to realize how much our old selves, when not crucified, have tainted our service to God and to others, including well-intentioned service. Anything done with self-motivation is often tainted.

For example, during the process of growing up, many people are deeply hurt by their parents. Why is this? In fact, which parent doesn’t love their child? They sacrifice and save for their children. Yet, they themselves are hurt by their own old selves because parents love their children within the realm of their old selves. When our old selves are not dealt with or broken, they end up hurting our children in various aspects of life.

2. Ephesians 2:10 *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

- ◆ Yes, indeed. God saved us and prepared us to do good works, which doesn’t just mean doing good deeds but rather doing what God wants us to do.

Many Buddhists and philanthropists may indeed do more good deeds, but their lives may not experience rebirth or salvation. **Doing good deeds alone cannot save us.**

- ◆ On that day, many will say, *“Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name?”* And then God will declare to them, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”*

Doing evil means acting according to one’s own will.

- ◆ A close follower of God, the ancient saint Gerhard Tersteegen, once said... **“When we try to do good by our own strength, no matter how good or holy it may seem, it is detestable. In the eyes of the holy God, it is extremely evil and sinful because our deceitfulness manifests itself.”** This old self has usurped the glory that belongs solely to God.
- ◆ Many of us serve in this way. We often prefer to do service because it interests us or because it allows us to showcase our abilities. But what God wants us to do, we often

neglect. That is serving ourselves and not serving God. God says first to manage yourself, but we don't. Our inner selves are filled with cattle, sheep, money changers, and those selling pigeons, yet we only go to do what we like.

We really need to pay attention to the various aspects of our "self."

3. Galatians 5:24 "... have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

- ◆ This is the salvation already accomplished by Jesus. We need to declare continuously whenever the desires of the flesh and sinful impulses arise, "Lord, I belong to you. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." If you keep declaring like this, you will suddenly find one day that the power of God will come upon you, and your bondage will be broken. It's not by your own efforts struggling, but by holding onto God's promises and His word.

4. *He must increase, but I must decrease.* Let the Spirit of God fill us.

- ◆ We must offer all our abilities to God, no longer relying on our own strength, in order to be released from sin.
- ◆ **Sin is activated by the established self, and the self is often pampered, elevated, and exalted. When this happens within us, it forms a great power.** We ask the Holy Spirit to fill us even more, only when this great God fills us, occupies us, can we completely destroy this old self.

5. Do not have any hope for the old self.

- ◆ Minister Pearl Young once said to Brother Watchman Nee, "I really hate my old self. How do I deal with it? It's still so strong." She expected Brother Nee to comfort her, but he said, "Sister, why do you still have hope for your old self at this point? I have no hope for my old self at all. It's beyond redemption. It only deserves to be crucified."

Minister Pearl Young was greatly helped by this and no longer felt upset for not doing something well or getting angry. Instead, she immediately came before the Lord and said, "Lord, I have left you. I easily get angry like this, please forgive me."

- ◆ **Perfectionists are those with a strong old self** because it's impossible to be perfect without recognizing the old self. Therefore, they demand perfection from the old self in every aspect, which is wrong and also impossible.
- ◆ Self-consciousness and sensitivity are both manifestations of a strong "self."

6. Drawing close to the Lord and dwelling in His love enable the "self" to loosen its grip and become increasingly powerless.

- ◆ Many people continue to dwell in feelings of regret and failure due to past mistakes, but such dwelling is of no avail. We only need to acknowledge our mistakes, immediately turn back to love Jesus, and all will be well.
- ◆ People like Lawrence and Thérèse of Lisieux (author of *The Little Way*) who have a close relationship with God tend to have less and less sense of "self." When they realize they have done something wrong, they simply say to the Lord, "Lord, I'm sorry. Look, without you, my self is so bad. Lord, I need you so much." Then they love the Lord again. They don't say, "How embarrassing, I did something wrong." **Don't live in the struggle of the old self.**
- ◆ Some people become very nervous immediately if they are corrected, fearing to be told what they did wrong. Their "self" is very strong, and their defense mechanism is strong too. They are afraid that a single word might hurt themselves, lowering their statuses slightly or damaging the perceived perfection.

The book of 1 John says *there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.* When

you abide in him, you will feel more secure in His love.

7. Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*

- ◆ Every day, when faced with any occurrence, it is necessary to declare: "I have already died, and it is Christ who lives in me." If criticized, I will not be hurt; if I make a mistake, I will quickly admit it.
- ◆ *"I live by faith in the Son of God,"* in English means that I live because of the faith of God's Son. Because the Son of God dwells within me, it is His faith that lives within me. I know that He loves me and sacrificed Himself for me, so no one can condemn me, and I don't seek the love of others because God loves me the most. I don't need to care about how others perceive me. Therefore, every time I am corrected, shamed, or insulted, I can declare this way. This declaration helps us continuously break free from our old self-awareness.
- ◆ All "feelings" are not good, such as feelings of inferiority or frustration. God does not want us to live based on feelings; instead, He wants us to live in the faith of the Son of God. As long as I confess with my mouth, it means I have chosen the faith of the Son of God and accepted His faith.

God doesn't care about your feelings at all; your feelings have no value to God. What God cares about is your will.

Your will chooses whether your mouth accepts and declares, "Lord, I choose to believe," and "Lord, I choose to rejoice." These have values in eternity.

It will be pleasant if you keep His promises within you, if God's words are ready on your lips.

8. Die to yourself daily

- ◆ Jesus was crucified for six hours, slowly dying. Similarly, our old selves don't die instantly but gradually, every day. That's why Paul said, *"I die every day."* The word "risk" was added later. Paul actually meant, "I die every day, I die daily for the testimony of Christ." Paul died daily, so much so that Christ's great power could be shown through him. Even his shadow and handkerchiefs could heal people.

So we also need to die every day so that Christ may be magnified in us.

IV. Conclusion

1. Proverbs 16:32: *"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."*

- ◆ God said, "If you can conquer your heart, master its inclinations, you are a greater warrior than one who captures a city."

2. Proverbs 25:28: *"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."*

- ◆ *"Without walls"* means that enemies can enter your inner sanctum anytime, day or night, to trample, destroy, and subjugate you. Thieves can also sneak in to steal the treasures you've stored within. If we don't subdue our own hearts, this is what happens.

3. Without faith, it is impossible to please God, and God cannot work either.

- ◆ Often, we find ourselves trapped in our own discouragement, despair, and doubt, hindering the work of the Holy Spirit because our own "self" keeps focusing on the darkness. **God cannot extend the rod of His power from Zion because Zion is**

filled with darkness.

A person with complete and unbroken old self, and a centered self is of little use in the kingdom of God and poses no threat to Satan because he or she lacks any real authority. Therefore, what we desperately need to fight for is to discipline our body and keep it under control and not to elevate our own position so highly.

Many times, we learn numerous techniques and methods to deal with the devil, but when we first deal with this “self” by breaking and not cherishing it, learning to set it aside, we inflict a great blow upon the kingdom of Satan. Do you know? **Those who have no selves are the ones who can shake the realm of the underworld.**

We must recognize that if this “self” remains alive within us, we have lost Christ.

Warfare (II) Assignment

1. What is the original meaning of “*discipline [our] body and keep it under control*”?
2. How does the Bible describe our old selves?
3. Think about which aspect of your old self hinders you from experiencing God more fully? Which aspect of your old self harms your partner or your children?
4. What methods does the Bible mention to help us increasingly break free from the control of our selves?
5. How do Ephesians 2:10 and Matthew 7:23 describe doing good and doing evil differently from common thinking?
6. In the recording, a little girl likes to help her mother mop the floor but doesn't like to pick up toys as her mother instructed. What does this show us?
7. Scripture memorization: Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 25:28, 1 Corinthians 9:26-27.