

Paul's Warfare on Behalf of His Apostolic Authority
2 Corinthians 10:4-6
Part Three

If we are true born-again believers then we should know that we are presently fighting against the forces of darkness. This is our reality. If we fight this battle in the power of the Spirit we will prove ourselves useful to God and we will be used by God to successfully fight against these forces, making it possible for those around us to come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

However, if we fail to fight this battle in the power of the Spirit, these things will not take place. In fact, rather than finding victory over these forces and being used by God to help those around us to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, we will find ourselves being overwhelmed by them.

Hopefully all this will come alive for us this morning as we return back to our study of 2 Corinthians. So where are we in this study? Paul is presently at war with a certain group of unrepentant individuals in Corinth over the issue of his apostolic authority. And what was at stake in respect to this battle? In Paul's mind what was at stake was the gospel itself, for he believed that their efforts to diminish him was for the purpose of promoting a different gospel other than the gospel than he had been sent by Christ to proclaim, and as such he viewed these opponents as the instruments of Satan. Therefore, he felt he needed to defend himself against their attacks, a defense that ultimately, as we will see this morning, brought about their defeat.

Therefore understanding his defense and the manner of his defense is important to consider in our ongoing battle with Satan and the forces of darkness. And this brings us to the question that we are presently seeking to answer. How did Paul go about defending his apostolic authority to the unrepentant within the Corinthian church?

Paul began the defense of his apostolic authority to the unrepentant within the Corinthian church by focusing on his activities (2 Corinthians 10:1-6). And where do we find Paul doing this? We find Paul doing this in **2 Corinthians 10:1-6**. So how did he initially begin?

Paul, in focusing on his activities, initially sought to address questions involving his demeanor (2 Corinthians 10:1-2). We see him doing this in **2 Corinthians 10:1-2**. So let me now read these verses for you. **“Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! (2) I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.”**

His opponents saw his perceived timidity when present with them face to face as fear and his boldness when absent, as expressed in his letters, as flesh-driven expediency. But they were wrong. The demeanor of Paul was not being dictated by fear or flesh-driven expediency but rather by **“the meekness and gentleness of Christ”** as he patiently and compassionately continued to reach out to them with the hope that they might repent.

So, what was the first area of Paul’s life that he chose to focus on as he sought to answer questions concerning his activities? The first area was his demeanor. So, what was the second area?

Paul, in focusing on his activities, also sought to address questions involving his methods (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). We see Paul doing this in **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** where he will explain to his readers that even though he is being criticized for his methodology in dealing with the Corinthian church in general and his opponents in particular, that even so his methodology is in fact consistent with a true and authoritative apostle of Christ.

So how far have we gotten in our examination of these verses? Last week we got as far as **verse 3**. So let me read this verse for you. **“For though we walk in the flesh [or in other words, though we are human], we do not war according to the flesh.**

When Paul said, “We do not war according to the flesh,” he simply meant that he and his associates did not war according to flesh-driven expediency or impulse.

So if their war with their opponents was not being driven by flesh-driven expediency or impulse, then by implication what was their war with their opponents being driven by?

Because Paul and his associates war with his opponents was not being driven by fleshly expediency or impulse, the clear implication is that their war was being driven and empowered by God's Spirit.

So how does this happen? How does one go about fighting a war not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit? It happens through the filling of the Spirit, or in other words when we, in response to God and what He has done for us, wholly surrender the control of our lives to Him.

What does **Ephesians 5:18** tell us? **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”** Clearly from this verse we can see that the filling of the Spirit is all about being controlled by the Spirit. And how do we know that the filling of the Spirit is all about being controlled by the Spirit?

We know that because the filling of the Spirit is contrasted with **“dissipation,”** or in other words being drunk with wine. Therefore if we truly want to engage the forces of darkness, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit, then we must be willing to give ourselves up to God wholly and completely so that we might be filled with His Spirit. This is what we learned last week and hopefully we have taken what we learned to heart and have sought to apply it and if we have then we are now in a position to move on in our study of **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** and therefore on to a new message.

So now having said this, let us continue on in our study of **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** by directing our attention to **verse 4**. And what did Paul say? **“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”** So clearly he is expanding on **verse 3**. So, what do we learn from this verse?

Because Paul and his associates did not war according to the flesh they did not use the weapons of the flesh, rather they, as those who were warring according to the Spirit as was implied in **verse 3**, chose to use the weapons of the Spirit, or in other words they chose to use the weapons that were **“divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”** This is what we learn from this verse. So now having said this let us now go back and look at this verse more carefully.

And how did Paul begin? He began by telling the Corinthians, **“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh.”** And wouldn’t this make sense? We, as the followers of Christ, who have been sent out into the world as His ambassadors, have entered into a spiritual battle with the forces of darkness and we should not fool ourselves into thinking that we can successfully fight this battle with fleshly weapons, for if we choose to do so not only do we run the high risk of being spiritually wounded, but we will certainly also have very little if any chance of being used by God to deliver anyone from the kingdom of darkness. Therefore we, like Paul, must put our trust in these weapons when seeking to deliver individuals from that kingdom.

So, what might these weapons of the flesh be that Paul was referring to? Paul in this text does not list them for us, but these weapons should not be difficult to identify since these are the weapons that the world will rely on when seeking to overcome an opponent. And what would be some of these weapons? Let me give you a rather extensive list but certainly by no means a complete list.

Some of the weapons of the flesh would be: human reasoning, human ingenuity, human planning, human strategizing, human philosophizing, human psychologizing and of course if all these fleshly weapons were to fail there is always the old standbys such as enmity, strife, and outbursts of anger. These are the weapons of the flesh. These are the weapons that the world might use to subdue an opponent, but these are not the weapons of Paul and neither should they be ours when combating the forces of darkness as we seek to subdue someone who is struggling with the gospel or who is even opposing the gospel, such as we find here within Corinth.

Rather we should use what weapons? We should use the weapons that are **“divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”** Isn’t that exactly what Paul tells us in **verse 4**? Absolutely! So how do we get access to these divinely powerful weapons?

The followers of Christ get access to “divinely powerful” weapons as soon as they surrender themselves completely to God’s will and thus are filled with the Spirit. This is how we get access to **“divinely powerful”** weapons.

So if we are in fact true born-again believers and if we also are presently Spirit filled, then we at this very moment in time have access to “**divinely powerful weapons.**”

So hopefully understanding this let us now ask ourselves this question. What are these “**divinely powerful**” weapons? It would have been nice if Paul had listed them out for us here in this verse but he didn't. But just because he didn't do it here it doesn't mean that he didn't do it elsewhere. He did. So where do we find such a list?

Some of the divinely powerful weapons made available to us when filled with the Spirit are listed out for us in Ephesians 6:14-18. In this particular passage Paul exhorted the believers in Ephesus in their ongoing war with the spiritual forces of darkness to put on “**the full armor of God.**”

And what did Paul tell them this would entail? He told them that it would entail them girding their loins with truth, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, shodding their feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, taking up the shield of faith, taking up the helmet of salvation, taking up the sword of the Spirit, and finally he told them that it would entail them “praying with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

This is what he told the church at Ephesus would be entailed when putting on the full armor of God. Now this might seem rather complicated wouldn't it? But it really isn't.

And why is this? It is because those who are Spirit filled will not only have access to such weapons as listed for us in **Ephesians 6:14-18**, they will quite naturally find themselves using these weapons, even unconsciously, when called upon to do so in the heat of the battle with the forces of darkness. This is a given. Thus the command to put on the full armor of God has far more to do with making sure that we are Spirit filled, or in other words completely under the control of God than it does in being able to identify any specific part of the armor for the armor will be ours in its entirety if we in fact have yielded ourselves wholly and completely to God and are thus under the control of the Spirit.

So, what should Spirit-filled believers warring according to the Spirit and with the weapons of the Spirit expect? We should expect the same thing as

Paul. We should expect, according to **verse 4**, “**the destruction of fortresses.**”

So, what were these fortresses that Paul specifically had in mind when he used the phrase “**for the destruction of fortresses?**”

Paul’s reference in 2 Corinthians 10:4 to “for the destruction of fortresses” (OCHYROMA) likely looks back to Proverbs 21:22 where the wise man is said to destroy the strongholds in which the ungodly trust.

So with this understanding, what might be some of the fortresses erected by his opponents that Paul specifically had in mind in **verse 4**? The fortresses erected by his opponents that Paul specifically had in mind were most likely the fortresses of self-confidence and self-exaltation that they erected in opposition to the progress of the gospel (cf. 10:12, 17-18; 11:4). I believe that this would be clear if we were to take the time to look at **2 Corinthians 10:12, 17-18; 11:4** which spell out for us very clearly the high view Paul’s opponents had of themselves especially when they compared themselves with Paul.

When his opponents looked at Paul and his methodology they saw a man who did not measure up to them in rhetoric or style. They saw themselves as a cut above Paul, and so much so that they in exalting themselves were willing to put Paul’s teachings aside and thus his gospel, while they confidently and proudly put forth their own version of it. So, what were these fortresses that Paul was seeking to destroy? The fortresses that Paul was seeking to destroy were the fortresses of self-confidence and self-exaltation that his opponents had erected against the progress of the gospel.

So was Paul afraid of engaging these fortresses? No, he was not afraid. And why was that? It was because he knew that he and his associates were up to the task.

In other words, Paul looked at himself and his associates as a conquering army that was more than capable of overcoming opponents and the fortresses that they erected against them and the gospel they preached. In fact, Paul already saw his opponents as in the process of being defeated and their fortresses being destroyed as a direct result of his very aggressive and

ongoing Spirit-filled defense of his apostolic authority within the Corinthian church.

Let me now read this verse for you and see if this is not so. **“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** In this verse, **2 Corinthians 10:5**, Paul detailed two ways in which he was successfully waging war against his opponents and these fortresses.

So, what was the first way? The first way was by **“destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”** So, what did this mean? In order to understand what he meant we need to understand the words.

The “speculations” and “every lofty thing” were the objections raised by his opponents against his apostolic authority (2 Corinthians 10:2).

His opponents had been attacking him, with what? They had been attacking him with **“speculations”** and **“lofty thing,”** or in others words with objections. So if the **“speculations”** and the **“lofty thing”** are the objections raised by his opponents, what was the **“knowledge of God?”**

The “knowledge of God” was a reference to what Paul himself revealed about God through His own preaching and suffering (cf. 2:14-17; 4:4-6; 8:7; 11:6, 13:8).

So who was winning this back and forth conflict, Paul or his opponents? Obviously, Paul believed he was winning. What did he say? He said, **“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing** [or in other words all your objections] **raised up against the knowledge of God** [or in other words the knowledge of God as revealed by my teachings as well as by the way I am living my life].” And was he correct? Absolutely! The vast majority of the church at Corinth had repented of their rebellion against him and therefore against God because of these very things. Therefore they in spite of their swagger were being systematically diminished in the eyes of the Corinthian congregation.

So, what was the first way Paul successfully waged war against his opponents on behalf of the gospel? The first way the Paul successfully waged war against his opponents on behalf of the gospel was by destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, or in other words putting down their objections through a clear presentation of the gospel combined with lives that backed up their message.

So if this was the first way, what was the second way that Paul successfully waged war against his opponents on behalf of the gospel? Let us continue to read **verse 5** and what does it say? **“And we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** So, what does this mean?

First of all, let me tell you what it is not. The issue in view is not Paul’s private struggle with his own thought life, as important as it is to make sure that we are thinking in ways that honor Christ. Paul is not striving to control his worry or lust or arrogance or tempting thoughts. Nor is it a criticism of philosophy or of intellectual pursuits as such, though it does contain an implied warning that all truth-claims must be subjected to the constrains of the gospel and its worldview.

Rather Paul’s concern in 10:1-18 is with a public dispute over the content of the gospel and the true nature of God’s commendation of those who preach it. His self-defense is not the expression of a hurt ego, but the necessary response against those who deny the gospel by their lifestyles and teachings.

Therefore, taking every thought captive to Christ means to evaluate every teaching concerning who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him to ensure that whatever is said and thought conforms to the character and purposes of Christ Himself. This is what it means and this is exactly what Paul had been doing in all of his interactions with his opponents. And this is what we should be doing. We should not idly sit by when we know that people in our fellowship or people who are professing faith in Christ are holding to incorrect views concerning the person of Christ or what it means to follow Christ. We must be active in seeking to change the way they are thinking.

And certainly this is especially true when those individuals are seeking to propagate their error within the church, which we will see in **verse 6**.

So now let us read this verse. And what does it say? **“And we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”** So, what did Paul mean by this? He is **ready to punish all disobedience**” but the **“punishment of all disobedience”** was conditional on whenever their obedience was complete. So, what did Paul mean?

Paul was prepared to punish all within the Corinthian church who did not repent, but Paul would not do so until those who professed repentance had the opportunity to show themselves as repentant (2 Corinthians 10:6).

So, what exactly was the punishment that Paul had in mind for those among his opponents that chose not to repent when he finally arrived in Corinth?

The punishment that Paul had in mind for those opponents that failed to repent was most likely excommunication, or in other words he would see to it that they would be removed from the church very much like Hymenaeus and Alexander in **1 Timothy 1:19-20**

If we are true born-again believers then we should know that we are presently fighting against the fortresses of darkness. This battle must be fought according to Spirit and with the weapons of the Spirit and not according to the flesh or the weapons of the flesh, and this will require us to keep the gospel of Christ at the forefront always being prepared to fight to defend it against any attack to diminish it or to change it either through what is being thought through words or being conveyed through lifestyles.

Are we up to this task? Absolutely, if we fight this battle according to the Spirit and with the weapons of the Spirit, or in other words if we in giving up our lives wholly and completely to God and are Spirit filled.

May God give us the grace to boldly proclaim the gospel in the power of the Spirit with the weapons of the Spirit so that we as God’s army might have the privilege of seeing the forces of darkness flee and their fortresses destroyed.