

Winning the Spiritual War, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Code: 47-67

Second Corinthians chapter 10, this morning, we return to our study of the first six verses of this great chapter on winning the spiritual war. The Apostle Paul was a soldier and a noble one at that, a soldier of Jesus Christ who endured hardship in the battle. From the time of his salvation on he was engaged in the dangerous and deadly war that we call spiritual warfare. He suffered in that battle greatly. He lived on the brink of death every single day but he never retreated from the front line where he relentlessly engaged in battle with the enemies of God.

And were we to ask him what he was fighting for and why he was so devoted to the battle at the cost he had to pay, what was worth such an effort? He would tell us this, "I fought for the truth of God, I fought for the honor of Christ. I fought for the redemption of sinners and I fought for the virtue of saints."

I really think that sums it up. Never did he fight for personal achievement, personal gain, personal comfort. It was the love of the truth, the love of the Savior, the love of sinners and the love of saints that compelled him to engage in the spiritual war.

And as we have been noting in our study of 2 Corinthians, the war was hot and heavy in Corinth. This letter is addressed to the believers in the city of Corinth who constituted the church which he himself had founded. He was under relentless and merciless attack there by false teachers who were endeavoring to scandalize his good name so that they could destroy people's confidence in him. They then could step in, take his place, and teach their satanic lies. They were hypocritical false teachers energized by seducing spirits teaching demon doctrine. They had a great impact on the church. You remember the church had engaged in a mutiny against Paul. Paul had addressed it and the church in general has now repented. But the time 2 Corinthians is written, Titus has come back to Paul, told him of their repentance, told him the relationship is restored. They are again demonstrating confidence in Paul's integrity and his apostolic authority and the rebellion against him is over.

That is true in general. However, it is also true that there were still some pockets of resistance. There were still some individuals, still some false teachers and those who follow them who were resisting Paul and the truth. There were still some in that congregation who were ready to dissimilate against the truth, some whom last week we called the recalcitrant minority, some who were rebellious at heart though quieted at the moment. As we said, the poisonous stream of error had been pushed ever so slightly underground for the time being, waiting for the next opportunity to surface.

Paul then in the final section of 2 Corinthians addresses that remaining remnant, that remaining element of rebels and false teachers. Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 are directed at those who continue to resist his authority and his teaching. So in this final section, Paul goes on the attack. The first nine chapters for the most part full of compassion and sensitivity and sympathy and pathos, now give way to a very firm direct even sarcastic attack on the remaining enemies in that church. To them he asserts his authority. He defends his authority. He defends his integrity. And then he threatens, frankly, to attack them and to wipe them out. He warns them that in a few months, two and a half months or so after they receive this letter, he will be arriving. And when he arrives if he finds any of them still there, he is going to deal with them in a very strong way.

So the last four chapters are directed at the hostile minority still disloyal to the truth who have some time now to repent before he arrives and deals with them firmly. He is a soldier and he will go to war with all his guns blazing, if he has to. That's the tone of this final section. It's really a battle strategy to deal with remaining enemies when he arrives and he gives them a few months fair warning to repent or leave.

Now as the section opens it opens in a battle motif. It opens in a warfare kind of genre in the first six verses. And here we get insight into Paul personally as the soldier who was willing to fight this war. This is probably the best known text on spiritual warfare in terms of the specific engagement of warfare. We have in Ephesians 6 a very well-known text on the armor for warfare. But here we find the warfare itself defined. It is a very important text. It is one that is being oft quoted today. There are, as you well know, in the Christian realm today all kinds of people talking about spiritual warfare, writing books about spiritual warfare, both books of fiction and books of supposed fact. There is a tremendous amount of effort so that people are traveling around with ministries of spiritual warfare, supposedly engaging in that and training others to engage in it. Very often they quote at the very core of their defense the verses in this particular text which when compared with what they do have absolutely no connection. It's important to rightly divide the word of truth here, so we understand what spiritual warfare is and what it frankly is not. And it largely is not what it is being purported to be in Christianity today in our time.

So let's look at this text and see spiritual warfare for what it really is in the clear context of Scripture. Paul engages in this warfare, first of all, he defines himself as a soldier. He defines the characteristics, the attributes the traits that he possesses as a soldier that make him effective.

Let's remind ourselves of the first one, an effective soldier is compassionate. He is compassionate. The best soldiers see war only as a last resort. The best soldiers seek not to use force unless it is absolutely necessary and there is no other option. The best soldiers seek peace extensively before they ever engage in war. They want to find every possible avenue to resolve the issue apart from bloodshed, carnage, death. That's Paul. So he begins in chapter 10 verse 1 with a compassionate

pleading, begging message to the Corinthian defectors.

"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." That's sarcastic, that second part of the verse, as I reminded you, his critics said of him when he's with you face to face here in Corinth he's wimpy, he lacks courage, he is a coward, he's meek. And when he goes away he gets very bold and writes you these fierce letters. So Paul turns the table a little and sarcastically says, "You say I'm meek when face to face, and bold when absent, well let me be meek when absent for a moment and urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." I'm pleading with you not because I'm weak but because I'm compassionate. Jesus wasn't weak. Jesus wasn't wimpy. Jesus wasn't a coward. He didn't lack courage but he did possess humility and compassion and he pled with sinners patiently to repent before he went to war against them.

There's no personal anger here. There's no personal vengeance. There's no hatred. There's no rage. He shows the same kind of patient compassion and love that Jesus showed. He pleads and begs with loving kindness and endurance. He is not weak. He is not a coward as they had accused him. The reason he acted the way he did when he was there was because he was so compassionate. But if he had to, he could be less than compassionate. His hesitance to act with power against their sins and against their defection was simply a matter of patient love, not a lack of courage. He was, as we noted last time, the tender warrior, the compassionate soldier who saw actual conflict only as a last resort against those who were fixed in their obstinate rebellion.

Secondly, we saw last time that the soldier is not only compassionate but he is courageous. In verse 2 he speaks of the courage that he will exhibit if he has to, although he would rather not. Verse 2 he says, "I ask that when I am present I may not be bold." If I had my choice I would like to be there and not to have to be bold, or courageous. I wish I didn't have to come with the confidence with which I purposed to be courageous. I would rather not do that. That's why I'm urging, that's why I'm begging, that's why I'm pleading with you. I don't want to be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some. But if I have to, I will.

He hopes not to have to be as courageous as he can be and notice at the end of verse 2, "Against those who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh." Those who treat him as if he were some lustful, greedy, proud person driven by inner corruption. If I have to deal with those people who call me corrupt, if I have to deal with those of you who have slandered me by saying I am a weak and cowardly man when face to face and only bold when absent, if I have to deal with those who have detracted against my name, I'll do it. I would rather not. I would rather be present and not be bold, if I have to be bold I will be. If I need to be courageous, I'll be courageous, I would rather be compassionate.

Thirdly, now we come to our message this morning. It is fine that a soldier be compassionate, it is necessary. That gives him patient endurance to give people the opportunity to repent. It is absolutely crucial that he be courageous should he engage upon the field of battle that will demand great courage to be triumphant. But compassion and courage would be useless if it weren't for the third characteristic of the soldier and that is that he is competent...he is competent. Here we come to the issue of capability...capability.

You can go as far as you want in trying to seek peace and ultimately you can't and so you have to engage in battle. You may have great courage to get into the fray, but unless you are competent, your courage will turn out to serve you no good at all. You have to have the weapons. You have to have the ability, the competence. And that's exactly what we find in verses 3 through 5. Without competence, courage becomes folly. Without confidence courage becomes folly, and history is loaded with accounts of fools. Fools who had great courage but were ill-equipped and who plunged into the battle armed with nothing but courage and were left corpses. The arsenal of their enemy literally overwhelming them. The Christian soldier as he engages in spiritual war must be compassionate, that is we must be patient and long-suffering with people. We must be courageous when the battle comes and it's time to fight we fight, but if we're going to win we have to be armed for it. And I would daresay that we have people running around today who believe they're engaged in a spiritual warfare, maybe exhibiting a degree of compassion, maybe even exhibiting a degree of courage but ill equipped for victory, don't even understand the enemy and don't understand the formidable character of the enemy, don't even understand who the enemy is or what the enemy is and don't have the weaponry for victory.

Paul warns these defectors, "I not only have compassion and courage, I have confidence. When I come and make war, it will be with weapons that you will not be able to stand against." Let's look at verses 3 through 5 where this is described.

Verse 3 is a very interesting verse. He does a little play on words. At the end of verse 2 he reminds them that they had said of him that he walked according to the flesh. And they were speaking of him in the moral sense. To walk in the flesh morally would mean to be corrupt, to be wicked on the inside, to be indecent, immoral, driven by lust and greed and pride. And that is what those false teachers had said about him. So he calls them those who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh, those who saw him as a corrupt wicked immoral individual who was a hypocrite of the worst ilk coming into the Corinthian church pretending to be virtuous when in fact he was a wicked evil man who wanted their money and not their souls. That was the accusation. He said I'll come against any remaining people who hold that view and propagate it.

Then in verse 3 doing a little play on words he says, "For though we walk in the flesh," and somebody might say, "Wait a minute, you just...you just said you're going to attack the people who accuse you of that, now you turn right around and say though we walk in the flesh." But there's a very, very careful

thing you must note here and that is that this is a play on words in which he moves from the moral to the physical. He does not walk in the flesh morally as they have accused him, but he does walk in the flesh physically, and that's what he means in verse 2. He's simply saying I'm human...I'm human. He denies the accusation that he is corrupt, but he agrees with the reality that he is human. He is not walking in the flesh in the sense that they mean, but he is walking in the flesh in the sense of being a physical human being.

In chapter 1 verse 12 he said he had a clear conscience, that he had walked in godliness, in holiness before them and in the world. He did not have a hidden life of shame, he said that in chapter 4. In the terms of Galatians 5:16 and 25 he walked in the Spirit and did not fulfill the lust of the flesh. So morally he did not walk according to the flesh but physically he was human. That's what he's saying. He's human. I am an Apostle, I bear apostolic authority, but I'm not a supernatural human being. My ministry is carried on in a frail human body. I am not controlled by the flesh but I am human.

Because he is the Apostle of Jesus Christ does not mean that he is somehow supernatural or superior humanly speaking. He is just like everybody else. He is, as he says in chapter 4 verse 7, nothing but a clay pot, as he says in chapter 5 verse 1, he's nothing but a tent to be torn down. He is just human. He is, according to chapter 4 verse 16, an outer man decaying every day. Though he is not then driven by wickedness on the inside, he is a man.

Now what makes him so formidable in battle, verse 3, is that though he is a man walking in the flesh humanly speaking, we do not war according to the flesh. And here comes the first warning to those who want to engage him in battle. You want to do battle with me, I give you warning. You look at me, you see a man. But when we go to battle I don't use human weapons. We do not war, that verb strateuomi(?) from which we get strategic or strategy means to go to war. It means to engage in battle. It is used four times in the New Testament and that's what it means. You want to go to battle? I'll go to battle, but I'm going to give you a warning, I don't fight like you. I don't fight on your level. Life and ministry for Paul was war, it is war for all of us. We don't have to fight it with human weapons. We are human but we don't use human weapons.

It's war, it's always war. We're all engaged in it. The kingdom of darkness is our opponent. And we are fighting for the truth, the preservation and proclamation of the truth. We are fighting for the honor of Jesus Christ. We are fighting for the salvation of sinners and we are fighting for the virtue of saints. We are engaged in war. In chapter 6 verses...verse 7 where Paul is describing this, he says he preaches the word of truth in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left. I mean, he comes with guns blazing in both hands, he says.

And what is it? "The Word of truth in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left." He's in battle all the time. Ephesians chapter 6 he says, "Take on the whole armor of God for we're wrestling not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and

the rulers of darkness, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. We're engaged in a warfare on a supernatural level against demonic hosts. First Timothy 1:18 Paul reminds Timothy of the urgency of fighting the good fight. Second Timothy 2:3 he tells Timothy, "Endure hardness or suffering as a soldier." He says at the end of his life, 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight." He is engaged in a spiritual war for the preservation of the truth, the honor of Christ, the salvation of sinners, and the virtue of saints. And you can't fight on that level with human weapons. So in verse 3 he makes it absolutely clear that we are not warring according to the flesh. We're not using human weapons. He would not fight with human ingenuity. He would not fight with clever methodology. He would not fight with technology. This is a war on another plain.

In fact, he further defines what his arsenal is in verse 4. He does it with a negative and then a positive. A negative is what it is not, the positive, what it is. Verse 4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh." We don't fight on that level cause our weapons are not on that level. They're not of the flesh, they're not human. They're not human.

Human weapons have no effect. Human weapons cannot fight the kingdom of darkness. Human weapons cannot deal with principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. Human weapons can't fight on that level. Human weapons cannot liberate souls from the kingdom of darkness. Human weapons cannot transform sinners. Human weapons cannot sanctify saints. They have no affect in the spiritual realm, no affect on the kingdom of darkness, no affect on Satan, no affect on his supernatural systems. No affect on the eternal souls of men.

What are we talking about here? What are the weapons of the world? What are the weapons of the flesh? Human reason, human wisdom, arguments of rationalism, human plans, strategies, ingenuity, organization, skill, eloquence, personality, cleverness, entertainment, religious showmanship, philosophical, psychological speculations, the mystique of the mystics, artificial atmospheres creating artificial environments, all the human approaches are impotent weapons, they are simply weapons of the flesh. You use those things to fight battles on the human level. You use those things to sell soup and Chevrolets and suits and garbage disposals and houses. You use those things to convince people they ought to go to college or that they ought to go to a different career or a job different job. You use those things to get people to vote for your bill or your proposition or your candidate or against him. You use those things to get people to give their money to charity or to invest in something that you want them to invest with the prospect of making money. You use those things to motivate people to work at a faster level so they can climb the ladder in their job. You use those kinds of methodologies to get people to produce a better product on the assembly line. You use those kinds of things to make people happier with their environment and make them get along better with their friends and family. Those are human things. You use those things to make people feel more emotionally stable or better about their life situation.

They're pea shooters, folks. Pop guns with ping-pong balls. They're plastic weapons with little soft rubber darts like my grandsons shoot at me. Such weapons only appear to be effective. They appear to be effective to people who have never seen and understood real fire power. Such weapons gain superficial temporary victories and it soon becomes how clear evil is still ensconced. They are very, very ineffective and yet you have so many people today who are attempting to find the great spiritual war with fleshly weapons and gaining what is only a superficial appearance of a victory.

Paul rejects all those toys and he really comes with true spiritual weapons. The negative weapons of the flesh give way to the positive description at the end of verse 4, weapons that are divinely powerful. We do not fight with weapons of the flesh but divinely powerful ones, literally powerful unto God. What is he saying? They're the weapons of God. We get them down from heaven. They're literally pulled down from God's own personal arsenal. Paul says I bring down weapons from heaven when I fight. You want to engage me, then it's your pop guns shooting ping-pong balls against my weapons pulled down from the arsenal of the sovereign God of the universe. He is not about to fight the war for truth and the honor of Christ and the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of saints with a pea shooter.

Why? Because the enemy is frankly formidable and gimmicks don't do it. How formidable is the enemy? Look at the end of verse 4, "We have these divinely powerful weapons for the destruction of fortresses." We're dealing with fortresses, folks. And, you know, to the mind of the New Testament reader, a fortress was a very, very powerful image. Some of you have visited the city of Corinth, some of you were there with me last summer. Just to the south of the city of Corinth, the ruins, is a great mountain that juts up like a stone right out of the green grass. That is the Acropolis, the high place. On the top of that Acropolis was a great fortified fortress impregnable that became the place to which the inhabitants of the city could retreat when they were engaged in a great conflict and from which they could defend themselves successfully.

Ancient cities, of course, were characteristically built a special fort where the people could be preserved. Many cities had the entire city walled and fortified with exterior and interior walls, great massive thick stone walls. These forts often had great towers, parapets from which people could scout and see encroaching enemy armies and from which they could fire whatever weaponry they had at their disposal.

So the Apostle Paul is saying...Look, we've got some very formidable enemies to deal with and the weapons that it's going to take to smash...the word destruction means to demolish, to bring about the demolition, the complete disintegration of these fortresses must be formidable, divinely powerful weapons. The word also, by the way, for fortresses can mean prison. And that too is a very interesting note. These people who are ensconced and entrenched in these great fortresses are also

imprisoned in them. The very place they think is their refuge is the place where they are prisoners. And their fortress becomes ultimately their tomb. They are the prisons of the damned, fortified by earth and hell.

Now these great fortifications are never to be assaulted by some human means, some human worldly methodology or manipulation, some clever technique because the stronghold in which sinners have entrenched themselves will never yield to such impotent weaponry. And that's exactly what Paul has in mind. And the goal is not just to hit a few shots along the side, but to demolish them, to utterly bring them to disintegration, cause them to crumble to ruins.

Now what's he talking about here? What are these fortresses? What is he attacking? What actually is he attacking? He gives the answer in verse 5, very, very clear. The end of verse 4, the destruction of fortresses. That's in the metaphoric language of the big fortress. Now in verse 5 he explains what he means using the same word, "We are destroying...and here's what he tells you the fortress is...speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God."

When you ask what the fortresses are, that's the answer.

We have these divinely powerful weapons for destroying fortresses and we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. That defines what the fortresses are.

We are destroying...let's take the first word, speculations, logismos, it means thoughts and ideas, opinions, reasonings, philosophies, theories, ideologies, religions. That's what it means. It has to do with thoughts, ideas, concepts, opinions. And those are the forts in which men hide. Ideological forts, philosophical ones, religious ones, and in their forts they try to hide and fortify themselves against God and against the gospel of Christ.

Please would you notice these fortresses are not demons. They are not demons. We have a lot of people who define spiritual warfare as chasing demons. The Bible does not define it like that. The Bible does not define it like that. It does not define spiritual warfare as us getting a group together to go march and find some demons and take authority over demons and send them off someplace. Never is the church instructed to do that. We are not fighting demons in a face-to-face confrontation, or spirit-to-spirit confrontation, or voice-to-voice confrontation. Our enemy has formed from demon sources ideologies and we assault those ideologies. Yes, ultimately they are doctrines of demons. Yes they come from seducing spirits through hypocritical liars who build these great edifices to human wisdom and demonic doctrine. But we assault the system, we don't chase the spirits. Scripture indicates right here that our war is for the destruction of fortresses. They are not demons, they are human demonically inspired ideologies set up in defiance of God.

Further, they are defined in this way, back to verse 5, take the word kai translated "and," it can also mean "even" which means it's a further explanation of the same thing, a better way to translate it, we are destroying speculations even every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. That's what a speculation is. He defines it right there. Every concept, every opinion, every reason, every philosophy, every theory, every ideology, every thought that is against God...that's a fortress. And they get very strong and very powerful, everyone of them. Every lofty thing, any ideology, any speculation, any theory, any religion which the pride of man erects like a fortified tower in which he entrenches himself, all of men's philosophical, psychological, intellectual, pseud-scientific and religious opinions set against God, that's what what the fortresses are.

In 1 Corinthians 3:20 they are called the reasonings of the wise...the worldly wise. They are raised up against the knowledge of God. Listen, beloved, all you have to do is remind yourself of Romans chapter 1 that everybody comes into the world knowing God, knowing enough about God to know His eternal power and Godhead, to be without excuse, but when they knew God they glorified Him not as God and you know the story of Romans 1. They turned against God, right? They turned their back on God. They created gods of their own, they turned against the true God and fortified themselves in their own false systems. And they have raised them up against the knowledge of God, raised them up against the gospel. The whole realm of divine revelation and redemption they have denied. All the anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible, ideologies spawned out of hell and put into their shape and form by men, all of that is the lofty thing, the speculation that has to come down.

Now Paul knew these fortresses very well. In fact, Paul had lived his whole life in one of them. That's right. He was born and reared in one of these fortified anti-God systems. What was it? Apostate Judaism...a Judaism that had reached the place where it was convinced that man could earn his own salvation through his own self-righteous works. Paul believed that. He believed that he had gained heaven by being circumcised, by being a member of the tribe of Benjamin, among the people of Israel, by being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, maintaining the Hebrew tradition, by being zealous toward the Law and blameless. He believed that he had achieved his own salvation. He was a self-righteous Jew to the degree, Acts 26:9, that he did many hostile things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He set himself against Christ. He raised himself up a fortress, lived in it and it was raised up against the knowledge of God. He lived in a fortress of apostate Judaism, of works righteousness. He had his own proud human ideology. He had found himself encased in this fortress which, by the way, was also a prison and eventually would become a tomb. He had been deceived and was locked in a damning ideology.

And then on the Damascus Road his fortress was smashed to bits. And he was led captive to Jesus Christ. Once his fortress of damning lies was impregnable and it crumbled under the power of God. All warfare, all spiritual warfare is aimed at smashing the fortresses of human reasoning against God.

This is very important to understand, beloved. In some cases it's religious, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto, Sokagaki(?) in Japan, whatever you want to call it, Animism, forms of religion all over the world, liberal quote/unquote liberal Christianity, these are all fortresses, ideological fortresses set up against the true knowledge of God.

On the other hand, it can be non-religious, it can be forms of naturalistic, humanistic evolutionary philosophy and psychology. As Philip Johnson says in his book, Reason in the Balance, "The most influential intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, educators and politicians and judges in America and the world are naturalists," end quote. Do you know what a naturalist is? A naturalist believes that God only exists in the mind, in the fantasy of religious non-intellectuals. They control our courts, they control our government, they control our universities. In our universities naturalism is the idea that nature is all there is and that is the virtually unquestioned assumption on which all matters of life are based. Man, says evolutionary science, which is the reigning authority, is the purposeless end of a process that didn't have him in mind.

Even the judges who make the legal decisions, the journalists who report the news, the teachers who teach in the university interpret everything in the light of atheistic naturalism. And those of us who believe in God and the gospel and the Bible are irrational, are dangerous to freedom and must only be allowed to have limited influence on the public discourse and limited influence on the public culture. God has no place in public life. God has no place in education. God has no place in government, social policy, law, courts or in determining morality. All this rejection of God is purported to be intellectual, to be scientific, to be freedom loving. And what it really is is the love of sin, it is a fort of fools that has become a prison and will become a tomb.

The atheism of our time, the evolutionary atheism of our time is nothing other than one of these ideological fortresses. As I quoted for you several weeks ago, Trion(?), a scientist writing in the Science Digest said, "Our universe is simply one of those things that happened from time to time." Evolution has led to the worse in human life. Karl Marx sought to dedicate Dos Capitale to Darwin. Freud took evolutionary theory and developed psychology from it. Arrogant pseudo-intellectual behaviorist, psychologists, psychiatrists and philosophers have far more personal problems than reasonable and they just passed them on to everybody. Some of them recognized how corrupt they are.

Peter Bragan(?) a psychiatrist writing in Mental Health Versus Religion in a humanist journal wrote this, and I quote from Bragan, this psychiatrist. "The average psychiatrist has more power to do harm in the lives of individuals than most religious leaders on earth. Moreover it would be hard to find a more unhappy lot than those clustered in the mental health field." What a commendation that is, a bunch of unhappy people who are deadly.

Dr. Edward Wilson, psychiatrist at Harvard, former Southern Baptist, said, "Bitter experience has taught us that fundamentalist religion in its aggressive form is one of the unmitigated evils of the world." He also writing in the humanist journal. "Get rid of the gospel, get rid of fundamentalism."

Even Adolph Hitler took Nietzsche's theory "God is dead," and drove the atheistic world view to its logical conclusion and Hitler said, and I quote, "I have freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality."

Such are the fortresses of sinners. Some of them are religious and some of them are, by our definition, irreligious. Some of them are supernaturalistic, and some of them are naturalistic. But in the end they are great edifices, great fortresses, formidable and not to be overthrown by pea shooters and ping-pong ball pop guns. These ideologies are entrenched in demonic reservoirs. They don't come down easily and you don't play games on the surface with them, you need some powerful weapons. Paul says I'm coming and when I face these ideologies that are set up against the gospel and the honor of Christ and the truth of the Word, I am going to unload the big weapons.

Verse 5, he tells you how formidable he is. End of the verse, "We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." What a statement. We're competent we're going to destroy these fortresses, smash them to the ground and we're going to take the people in them captive. What a magnificent picture.

Now it leads us to the crucial question...what are these weapons? What are these weapons? The answer comes clearly in the statement I just read, "We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." What's in the fortress? Thoughts, concepts, opinions, ideologies, philosophies. And we're going to take all of those thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ.

Listen, there's only one way, there's only one way to destroy error and that is with...what?...truth. Now you know what the weapons are. The only way you can take wrong thoughts and make them right is to replace error with...what?...truth. So when you look at Ephesians 6 and you see the soldier who is the Christian soldier, and you see him with all of his clothing and then it says he has one weapon, that weapon is a sword which is the Word of God...the Word of God. You don't fight the spiritual warfare with a bunch of anti-demon formulas whispered at them or shouted at them. You don't fight the spiritual warfare with some kind of magical incantations. The spiritual warfare that you fight is an ideological warfare that is fought at the level of the mind and when you find people ensconced and entrenched in the great fortresses of these ideologies, you assault them with the truth. That's what we're all about. That's what we do.

It amazes me today that in this whole spiritual warfare movement there is this tremendous interest in assaulting demons and assaulting demons and fighting demons and fighting demons. But if

somebody comes in and points out error and wants to correct error, they want to throw you out. There's no room to fight error. There's just a place to fight demons. They've got...those demons have to love that.

The verb here where it says we are taking every thought captive means literally to take a prisoner with a spear. It has the word spear in it in the verb. It means to take a prisoner with a spear. We smash the fortress to the ground, went in and put a spear in the back of the prisoners and marched them out. That's a magnificent metaphor of rescuing a soul from damning lies, isn't it? We marched them right out and brought them into subjection to Jesus Christ, that's what it's saying. Wow.

You see, our spiritual warfare is about the truth and the honor of Christ and the consequence salvation of souls. I'm not concerned with demons. I don't have anything to say to a demon. I'm not interested in talking to a demon. Let the Lord talk to them. I have nothing to say to him. But I'll tell you what, I have a lot to say to the damned souls fortified in the fortresses of lies. I want to get them out of those.

The rebellion of the sinful proud heart is ended when the fortress comes down and Christ is Lord. That was Paul's experience. He lived in that great fortress with all the other self-righteous Jews and the whole thing came crashing down around him and he was taken captive to Jesus Christ and immediately out of his mouth he says, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" He knew what it was to have your fortified place destroyed and to be taken prisoner to Christ. He even calls himself the prisoner of Jesus Christ, doesn't he?

Through the ages millions of great thinkers and millions of lesser thinkers have had their strongholds torn down and bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. That's why we attack false doctrine. That's why we attack those things because they are fortifications against the knowledge of God that become prisons, that become tombs. Old fortresses lie in ruins though around the world as the prisoners march off in a new allegiance to Jesus Christ, that's the spiritual warfare. The weapons are clear, the truths of the Word of God.

You want to fight the spiritual war, learn the Scriptures. Learn how to deal with the error. Learn how to confront the error with the truth. I'm not talking about some kind of bare declaration, I'm talking about reasoning the truth out of Scripture. People say, "Why...why do you always spend all the time in the Scripture?" You got a better weapon? I don't think so. I suppose I could figure out some human weapons but I'm not going to fire pop guns when I can use the Howitzer of Scripture. Paul says I'm not going to waste my time fighting on your level with your weapons, I'm just going to bring the Word of God and let it do its work.

Error falls only before the truth. Rebellion ends when truth prevails. And that's what we do, we preach truth, we teach truth, we write the truth, we proclaim the truth. Only the Word of God can

smash the lies. And if you're going to be out there in the spiritual war, you need to be armed, you need to know the word and, boy, Paul was formidable when it came to that. You don't fight their battle on their level. Only the Word of God can smash the lies. It is the power of God. That's why Paul way back, 1 Corinthians, first time he described his ministry among them, he says to them in verse 17, "I didn't come to you in cleverness of speech." Verse 18, "I preached the Word of the cross to those who are perishing it is foolishness but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Verse 19, "I'll destroy the wisdom of the wise, set aside the cleverness of the clever." Verse 20 he says, "So where's the wise men, where's the scribe, where's the debater of this age? Where are all these philosophers? They're literally obliterated by the power of the preaching of the cross." That's what he's saying.

Verse 25, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Down in chapter 2 he says, "I didn't come in the superiority of speech, of wisdom. I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I wanted not to preach persuasive words of men's wisdom but to demonstrate the spirit and power so your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but the power of God." I don't want to give a clever sermon that gets people to make some profession of faith in Christ because of the cleverness of my sermon. I want to hit them with the Word of God and let it do its real work.

Then what you've got, Paul knew this, is a lot of people who have been convinced by the wisdom of men and that's not salvation. The Scripture is the weapon that smashes the fortresses that people have built up to buttress themselves against the knowledge of God. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," Paul says, "for it is the power of God unto salvation." Hebrews 4:12, "For the Word is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword." The Word is the weapon. And that's what we read you earlier, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, it says it, verse 5, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord." That's the message of power. Over in chapter 6 verse 7, "In the Word of truth, in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left." It's the Word of truth that carries the power of God that makes up the weapons of righteousness. Scripture is the only weapon that smashes the fortress and takes the people captive to Christ.

Why? Because you can't see the error until you see the truth and you can't be converted until you understand the gospel. How obvious is that? And may I hasten to add there's a wonderful element here back in chapter 10? Paul is not content just to destroy the false theories, he's not content just to smash the fortresses, he wants to bring the people under the saving lordship of Christ. He doesn't just say that we're destroying speculations and every lofty things, he says we're taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We're bringing them to the truth and we're bringing them under submission to Christ.

By the way, that little phrase "the obedience of Christ" is a synonym for s

salvation. Obedience always being the mark of true salvation. "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments. Whoever hears My Word and does it is My disciple." Obedience, always the mark of salvation. We're bringing people out of these fortified refuge of lies and bringing them under Jesus Christ.

So, beloved, we are called to a spiritual war. Yes we are. But you don't fight that war by chasing demons, you fight that war by knowing the Word and you fight that war by assaulting the fortresses of lies that men have built up against the truth and you do it compassionately but you do also courageously. You want to be patient, you want to be gentle, you want to give people time to comprehend and understand, but you also engage in the battle relentlessly and when they are entrenched, you go to war. And only the truth can do that. That's why Paul said to Timothy, "Preach the Word...right?...preach the Word. preach the Word." That's why he said to Titus, "Speak the things that are concerning sound doctrine, and speak with all authority and let no man disregard you."

The good soldier, the noble soldier is compassionate, courageous and competent. One last point very brief. A very, very important part of being good in war, he is calculating...he is calculating. The good soldier understands you have to take everything into account...timing, very important. Who is your enemy? Recognizing him, getting him when he's vulnerable, all of that essence of strategy. He knows there's an appropriate propitious time and place when the enemy is clearly in sight and clearly defined. He doesn't just go into the village with his machine gun blazing in mow-down both the enemy and the innocent. He's not going to get somebody caught in friendly fire. Verse 6, he's calculating. "And we're ready to punish all disobedience." Hold it there for a second.

We're ready, he says...I mean, he's ready, he's trained, he's armed, he's ready...prepared to the hilt, the delay has nothing to do with cowardice. He is ready. By the way, that word verb for "we are ready" is a military term. We are ready to punish all disobedience. Ready to avenge. A direct threat to those who know they are to be obedient to Christ but refuse to do it. We're ready when they've entrenched and they've dug their heels in and they will not respond and they will not repent and they're going to destroy the church, we're ready to move in against them. He will not let them destroy the church. He'll act in severe ways against them. He's done it before in other circumstances in the New Testament. He did it in Ephesus as we read about in 1 Timothy, he'll do it again. He's prepared to get in there and purge out those false teachers and those hypocrites.

Why is he waiting? Why is he waiting? Very important, verse 6, "We are ready to punish all disobedience whenever your obedience is complete." Your obedience, he's talking to the church. He is saying this, whenever the church collectively is complete in its obedience. What does that mean? Everybody who is true to the gospel has taken his stand. When you people are all finally agreeing to be obedient, and it's clear who the remainder are, then I'm going to act. I don't want to get you in the

line of fire. I don't want to blast you in the midst of the fray. I don't want you to be a casualty. I'm waiting and I'm going to give you a few more months until all of you who are obedient are complete and the rest are clearly the recalcitrant entrenched incorrigibles. I want that enemy clearly defined.

He would wait until it became fully manifest who among the Corinthians would submit to the truth and who would finally reject it in a fixed posture. And he says when I come I'm going to do battle with them and I'm going to force them to surrender or to accept their tower as a tomb. What discrimination.

This soldier doesn't shoot everybody. This soldier is compassionate and gracious and gentle with those who respond and with the rest he comes with a fierce warlike attitude. Compassionate, courageous, competent, and calculating. You better be ready.

How do we deal in this world in the spiritual warfare? Tenderly, patiently, compassionately, courageously and when it comes to the war you better know the Scripture because the only way to smash the ideological strongholds is with the truth and you want to do it at the appropriate time to the appropriate people. Sometimes that's very hard...very hard. Sometimes there's someone in a false system and you treat him with tenderness and compassion because you're not sure how they're going to respond. After a period of time they dig deeper and deeper and deeper. I remember a young man like that in our church in Mormonism, and I treated him with compassion and care and prayer and did everything I could to try to pull him out over a period of time and eventually he became entrenched, made his decision and then I remember I went to war. And I went to him one day with all the guns of blaze...of truth blazing and he panicked in the expression of the power of the truth in that hour, called some Mormon bishops to come to the house and rescue him and they rushed him away to what I trust was not his tomb, the fortress of Mormonism.

There are times like that but the spiritual battle has to be fought. You need to be compassionate, courageous, competent and calculating. We'll learn more as we go through this text, let's pray.

Father, thank You again this morning for the fact that Your Word gives light, the truth causes all error to crumble. O God, may we fight the spiritual war like Paul did. May we be willing to give our lives for the truth of God, the honor of Christ, the salvation of sinners and the virtue of saints to uphold Your truth as it applies to the lost and the saved, to go to battle for the truth with the truth against all the lies in which men entrench themselves. And may You be pleased to give the victory for Your glory and Your honor in Christ's name. Amen.

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