

## 2 Cor 10:1-6 Waging Spiritual Warfare, part 2

Last week, we began our study of this passage.

The first part of chapter 10 deals with spiritual warfare. Note the language here: vs. 3 “war,” vs. 4 “weapons of our warfare,” “pulling down strongholds,” “bringing into captivity.” There is a lot of military language here.

The main verb in this passage seems to be “we war” (.3). So Paul is telling us here how he wages spiritual warfare. He’s ready to fight against the false teachers who had infiltrated the church.

Like Paul, we are engaged in a great spiritual struggle. Our situation is not the same as Paul’s, but we are part of the same war. We have the same goals as Paul. We use the same weapons in this spiritual battle. Hopefully, we don’t have to deal with false teachers; but if we did, Paul gives us an example of how to fight them.

Thus far, we’ve seen that

- I. .1 We should approach our battles with Christlike meekness and gentleness. We want to be humble and gracious, patient and lenient as much as possible, especially when dealing with conflict.
- II. .2 If that kind of approach does not solve the problem, then we need to use a stern and severe approach.
- III. Wage spiritual warfare spiritually. .3-6
  - A. .3 Spiritual warfare is not conducted “according to the flesh.”
    1. We “walk in the flesh.” .3a  
To walk “in the flesh” simply means that we are in this physical world. We are limited to normal human experiences and abilities.  
However...
    2. We do not wage war “according to the flesh.” .3b  
“according to” the flesh implies using worldly methods and arguments. We don’t fight this battle like unsaved people do.
  - B. Spiritual warfare does not use “carnal” weapons. .4
    - A. We must engage in warfare, but the weapons we use in this battle are not the same weapons used by unsaved people.
    - B. The word “weapons” (ὄπλα) refers to the instruments or equipment of war, both offensive and defensive.

C. However, we don't wage this war like others do. Our weapons for this warfare are not "carnal."

1. The word "carnal" (σαρκικα) means "fleshly."

a) He's not talking about physical weapons like bows and arrows, swords, or javelins. These physical weapons are not appropriate for a spiritual battle.

b) Carnal weapons are secular ideas or methods that the unsaved world would use. Christians do not use worldly philosophy, traditions, or methods.

(1) The unsaved world uses the weapons of deceit, lies, intimidation, compulsion, and force.<sup>1</sup>

(2) The unsaved world uses weapons like eloquence, manmade schemes, personal magnetism, psychological manipulation, crowd dynamics and showmanship.<sup>2</sup>

c) Those are carnal, fleshly, ungodly weapons and methods. They may be effective, but they are the wrong methods for Christian warfare, and we cannot use them. We don't use fleshly, secular, human methods.

**App:** We must be very careful and always on guard not to adopt the world's way of dealing with problems. The unsaved world often uses methods that are contrary to biblical values.

One of those carnal ideas/concepts that has affected the church for many years is **pragmatism**—the idea that if a method works, it must be good. Essentially, pragmatism says that the ends justify the means. If the goal is good, then whatever methods we use to attain that goal must be acceptable. If something works to attract people to the church, then that method is acceptable.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 334.

<sup>2</sup> Kent, 152.

**Illus.:** The pastors at Saddleback Community Church dressed up like characters from the movie *Toy Story* to introduce a series of messages about Christian themes in movies.

We may be tempted to use worldly methods, but we must not do that. Our weapons are not carnal/worldly.

The main goal of the church is to glorify God. We can use only those methods that are in keeping with the honor and glory to God. Any method that is irreverent or “fleshly/carnal” would be out of order.

D. Spiritual warfare uses effective weapons. .4-6

1. .4b Spiritual weapons are “mighty in God” (δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ). Perhaps the sense is “mighty for God in achieving his purposes.” God’s power is at work in the spiritual weapons that he provides.
2. What kind of mighty weapons is he talking about?
  - a) We know that they are not fleshly/carnal—not the kind of weapons that the unsaved world would use.
  - b) He does not list the weapons he has in mind.
  - c) The only weapons we have in this struggle are spiritual weapons: the Word of God, salvation, prayer, goodness, truth, beauty, faith, and virtuous behavior.

The Gospel is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). We simply proclaim the Word of God and pray that the Spirit of God would cause people to repent and believe.

Here are the kind of weapons we have:

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Matthew 7:12 *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

2 Timothy 2:24–25 *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,*

2 Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

3. .4end Spiritual weapons are able to pull down strongholds.
- a) To pull down something (καθαίρειν) means “to destroy completely, to wreck.”
  - b) The word “strongholds” refers to fortresses and military fortifications. In the ancient world, most large cities had a fortress in which the people could find refuge in case of attack. E.g., castles in Europe during the middle ages.
  - c) He’s not referring to actual buildings here but ideas or thoughts; in particular, bad ideas, false teaching/theology. This is a *fortress of falsehood*, a fortress of evil, a fortress of unbelief and opposition to the Christian gospel.  
**Quote:** These strongholds ... are the systems, schemes, structures, and strategies that Satan designs to frustrate and obstruct the progress of Christ’s gospel.<sup>3</sup>
  - d) These are fortresses of false human thought, fortresses that deny the Bible as the word of God and salvation through grace alone, by faith alone, and through X alone.
  - e) Paul’s goal is to destroy these fortresses of falsehood. These false teachings must be destroyed, wrecked, torn down. There is no room for compromise on these issues.

**App:** Many religious people today argue for tolerance and inclusion in theology. We should not be so strict in our beliefs; we should be more flexible and allow for various opinions. We have to appreciate that everyone has his own “truth.”

Paul had no tolerance for false teaching. Neither did Jesus. Neither should we. Our job is to tear down and destroy these false and unbiblical ideas, not appreciate or recognize them as valid or dialog with them. They are wrong and our goal is to destroy them.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 335.

Are there any fewer fortresses of falsehood today than in Paul's day? No, there are many more. I would suggest that there is more false theology floating around today than at any other time in history. And the amazing thing is that people accept and believe these crazy ideas. Our goal is to tear down and destroy all claims contrary to the biblical Gospel.

How?

4. .5 Spiritual weapons are able to cast down unbiblical claims.
  - a) In vs. 5, Paul tells us exactly what he means by “pulling down strongholds” – he’s talking about “arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” I.e., in particular the false teaching of the false teachers. Paul intends to tear down and demolish these fortresses of falsehood.
  - b) .5 He goes on to describe what kind of strongholds/fortresses he has in mind.
    - (1) Arguments/imaginings (λογισμοὺς) – thoughts, reasonings, ideas, speculations. I.e., human reasoning that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. I.e., philosophical fallacies, religious sophistries—intellectual arguments of the unsaved man.
    - (2) Every high thing (ὑψώμα) exalting itself against the knowledge of God.

The word refers to an elevated place like a wall or a tower in a military fortress/castle. Fortresses were usually built on hills or mountains—high places. Defenders of a fortress would be shooting from such a high spot, and attackers would be trying to destroy that elevated structure.

**Quote:** The word refers to any human act or attitude that forms an obstacle to the ... knowledge of God contained in the gospel of Christ crucified and therefore keeps men in oppressive bondage to sin.<sup>4</sup>

Cf. 1 Cor 3:19 *the wisdom of this world*

He wants to throw down every and all arrogant, lofty human thoughts lifted up against God. He wants to demolish all ideas that claim to be higher or better than biblical claims. I.e., philosophy or religious ideas that are contrary to the Gospel.

Remember that Paul was a highly educated person. He was well-versed in the philosophy and religion of his day. He could quote the pagan Greek poets. He knew all about lofty, heady, high-minded human philosophy and reasoning. He considered it all to be “the wisdom of this world.” He wanted to pull it down and destroy it because it exalted itself against the knowledge of God.

**App:** All around us today, people claim to have arguments against God or arguments contrary to clear biblical teaching. We are surrounded by falsehood and error, some of it coming from people claiming to be Christian. That’s why we must...

Jude 3 ... *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

Paul’s aim is to cast down these anti-God and anti-Bible arguments. That is, he wants to engage these arguments and disprove them. He wants to both defend the faith against attacks (apologetics) and press the claims of the Christian faith (evangelism).

How?

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<sup>4</sup> Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 380.

We use spiritual weapons like prayer, preaching the Gospel, loving our neighbors, telling the truth, and living a virtuous life. These are powerful weapons that the Spirit of God can use to penetrate the defenses of the unsaved.

What is the goal here? ...

5. .5b Spiritual weapons bring every thought into captivity of Christ.

- a) Here is the very heart of the struggle. The Christian battle is over “thoughts” – i.e., ideas, arguments, reasoning, and claims.

It’s not a physical battle. It’s not a battle over money and property or politics; those are side issues in this battle. The true battle is over issues of the mind—ideas, teachings, values. It’s a struggle of human, secular thinking versus biblical thinking.

- b) The word “thought” here (*νόησα*) refers to the mind, our faculties for thinking, reasoning, and deciding. It may refer to schemes or designs of the mind.

As used here, he’s probably speaking negatively—the corrupt thoughts, designs, or schemes of the unsaved mind, faulty patterns of thought that hinder people from accepting the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 4:4 *whose **minds** the god of this age has blinded, ...*

2 Corinthians 11:3 *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your **minds** may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

“Ideas have consequence; ideas rule the world.” Our thoughts are the center of this spiritual warfare. Our goal is to conform human thinking to biblical standards.

**App:** This struggle is still going on today, almost 2000 years after Paul wrote these words. It’s the same battle—human ideas vs. God’s ideas; the wisdom of God vs. the foolishness of men. Who is the true authority? Whose word are we going to follow?

We have to evaluate everything by this standard: are these foolish human ideas or are they biblical?

- c) Here's the two-fold goal: we want to destroy false arguments and we want to bring our thinking into submission to God's thinking. Our thoughts must be captive to Christ. We want those who are thinking wrongly to submit themselves to proper ideas and biblical teaching.

**Quote:** The picture seems to be that of a military operation in enemy territory that seeks to thwart every single hostile plan of battle, so that there will be universal allegiance to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Paul's aim is to capture the unsaved man's rebellious thoughts and reasonings and drag them away like prisoners of war.

Under the Roman military system, prisoners of war were often executed or sold into slavery. We want to take false human thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

**Illus.:** I occasionally watch videos of a man arguing for Christianity on a college campus. He faces all kinds of difficult questions and claims, and he does a great job of defending the claims of Christianity and tearing down claims against the Bible.

- d) Typically, unsaved people do not want to be conquered by Christ. They want to be independent thinkers; they want to avoid any form of intellectual captivity or submission. They want to retain the right to think for themselves, to be critical thinkers. They certainly don't want to be brought to a place of obedience to X.

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<sup>5</sup> Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 380.



- e) But the goal of our spiritual warfare is that our adversaries must totally surrender to Christ and his word. People must repent of their false and ungodly ideas. They must submit themselves to Christ and obey his word. I.e., they must be born again by the Spirit of God. This is unconditional surrender.

Notice the completeness or fullness of Christ's victory over his enemies—notice the word “every” and “all” in vss. 5-6. *The aim is total victory.* Every fortress is destroyed, every captive made obedient to Christ, and all disobedience punished.

**App:** As much as we want that for other people, we must begin this process with ourselves. We must submit our own thoughts and ideas to God's Word. We must yield our thinking to God; we must think God's thoughts after him, which leads to obedience to his commands.

Once we get ourselves in order, we can start helping other people to submit their thinking and beliefs to God.

So the battle really begins within ourselves. We must strive and struggle to make sure that we are submitted to Christ in our thinking, our attitudes, and our methods. If we are not submitted to Christ, we don't have anything to say to anyone who is not submitted to Christ.

- f) Christians have a starting point for all of our thinking—“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” God is the only reason we can understand truth. Without God, we can have no certainty of truth.

6. .6 Spiritual weapons are able to punish all disobedience.

The Roman military used to come into a region, destroy the fortresses, and capture the rebellious people. The Roman army would defeat, subjugate, and incorporate an entire nation into the empire. And that's what Paul wants to do spiritually.

- (1) .6a Paul is standing by at the ready. I.e., he's like a soldier standing by, ready to engage in battle.

Roman army garrisons were stationed all over the empire. Soldiers in these fortresses stood ready to deal with any signs of rebellion or uprising.

That's how Paul pictures himself—he stands ready to punish disobedience severely.

- (2) The word “punish” (ἐκδικῆσαι) is built on the root word for “just/fair/righteous.” It could be translated as “avenge, to execute justice.” The word means, “to punish on the basis of what one deserves.”
- (3) And the word for “disobedience” (παρακοήν) refers particularly to the failure to hear or to listen and thus be disobedient.

The false teachers heard true teaching from Paul, but they refused to listen; they disobeyed the word as taught by Paul and the other apostles.

- (4) .6 Paul has a two-pronged strategy to accomplish this goal among the Corinthians.
  - (a) *First*, he expects that the church will submit to his teaching and authority. He wants to make sure their “obedience is fulfilled” first. He believes that the majority of the church is still loyal to him and willing to follow his teaching. He wants to make sure that the church will comply with his teaching; he expects that it will.
  - (b) *Second*, when he is sure that the church is supporting him and not the false teachers, then he'll punish the false teachers who had infiltrated the church.
  - (c) What kind of punishment is he talking about? He doesn't tell us, but his language in this context is rather stern, so he's probably talking about exposing the errors of the false teachers and kicking them out of the church if they fail to repent.

**App:** It's entirely proper for leaders of a church to expose and root out false teachers. Church leaders must be very bold and aggressive in dealing with those who are teaching falsehood or living in gross disobedience to God's Word. We cannot tolerate in the church those who are teaching error or those who living an ungodly lifestyle.

And it's very important that the church as a whole is supportive of this kind of church discipline. When facing a crisis like this, the church must stand with its leaders for biblical truth and against error. If the church compromises and tolerates error, all is lost.

What was the outcome of this situation in Corinth? When Paul arrived there, did he have a showdown with his adversaries? Did they have a big debate over who had authority in the church and what teaching they would follow? Some scholars believe that this letter served to chase the false teachers out of the church. Perhaps the church drove them out before Paul even arrived. It's impossible to know what happened, but there is some evidence that Paul's words had their desired effect. Hopefully, these stern words helped the church do the right thing.

How do we wage spiritual warfare? We begin with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. We approach the problem with humility and patience. If people don't respond to that, we have to go to war. We wage warfare by destroying false arguments and reasonings contrary to the knowledge of God, bringing those false thoughts into captivity for obedience to Christ, and standing ready to punish every expression of disobedience.

Probably the most difficult part of the spiritual battle we are in is to bring our own thoughts into the captivity of Christ. If our own thoughts and desires are not submitted to God, we can't expect to be victorious in this spiritual battle against falsehood and ungodly ideas. Before we attack others, we must attack ourselves to make sure we are in submission to X and his word.

Once we submit to Christ ourselves, then we can seek to engage in the work of pulling down strongholds, arguments, and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. We can work to defeat the fortresses of falsehood. We must not tolerate error and false teaching in the church, and we must try to expose the error of unbiblical thinking out in the world.

We must use the weapons God gives us—the word, prayer, truth, love, goodness, beauty, and godly behavior. We don't use fleshly, carnal, worldly methods in this battle. We try to solve the problem with Christlike humility and gentleness if we can, but if we need to be assertive and stern, we know how to do that as well.

Ultimately, we know that “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that IX is Lord.” God himself will cast down false arguments and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Until that great day, we must be involved in this spiritual battle. We use the weapons God has given us—the word of God, prayer, love, goodness, beauty, and truth to make an impact in this dark and dying world.