

Winning the Spiritual War

(2 Corinthians 10:1-6)

Every day we are fighting a spiritual war. Do you want to win it? Of course! As Paul again responds to charges by his critics in Corinth, we can find help in the battle for our minds. Paul knows failure to submit to his apostolic authority would cause believers to disregard his inspired writings and lead to spiritual disaster in their lives. Therefore, he writes some bold commands, not to soothe his wounded pride but because of his love for the Corinthians. In this passage, we find **three** principles for **winning the spiritual war**. First ...

Be Christlike (10:1-2).

Paul responds to his critics, *I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!* (10:1). Some of Paul's enemies in the church have attacked his integrity by saying he is bold in his letters but humble, or timid, in person. Therefore, he is accused of duplicity, which would be an indication he did not have the apostolic authority he claimed to have. So, it is an attack not only of his character but also his apostleship.

Paul reminds the Corinthians he appeals to them *by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*. Jesus Christ is Paul's model for teaching. The word translated meekness (PRAOTES, pra-oo'-tace) doesn't mean weakness but "power under control." It refers to a patient endurance of mistreatment like Christ experienced when He was crucified.

The word translated *gentleness* means "forbearance" or "leniency." It is the result, or fruit, of *meekness*. If you are meek, you will be gentle. Paul taught with the same attitude as Jesus. What does our Lord say in Matthew 11:29a-c?

Christ's method of teaching and preaching is the model for all true teachers and preachers. What does Paul write about this method in 1 Corinthians 11:1?

Those who think Paul is timid or weak are badly mistaken. Therefore, Paul writes, *I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh* (10:2). This explains why Paul is writing this letter. He is praying that when he comes to Corinth he won't have to show boldness and harshly reprimand his accusers. He doesn't want to spend his time there dealing with troublemakers. Paul goes so far as to beg them not to make it necessary for him to *show boldness* when he comes.

Paul identifies his critics by writing *he will show boldness . . . against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh*. Some false teachers in Corinth are trying to gain a following for themselves by discrediting Paul. So, they accuse Paul and his associates of conducting themselves *according to the flesh*.

Walking, or living, *according to the flesh* is being controlled by greed and sinful desires (Rom. 8:5). If the false teachers do not repent of their slander, Paul will boldly discipline them when he arrives. Paul's model is Christ, who though He was meek and gentle, boldly condemned sin and false teachers. In Matthew 23:15a, Jesus confronts the hypocritical Jewish leaders by saying: "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*" Then, what does He specifically accuse them of in the rest of that verse?

Does that sound timid or weak? Absolutely not! To win the spiritual war, **be Christlike** and ...

Be competent (10:3-5).

Paul writes, *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh* (10:3). This means, though we are humans, we don't wage war as humans do. We are all in a spiritual war, fighting against Satan and his cronies.

In verse 4, Paul writes about the weapons of our warfare. How does he describe these weapons in the rest of that verse (10:4)?

We cannot fight a spiritual war with worldly *weapons*, such as intimidation, manipulation, trickery, hypocrisy, etc.

Paul describes the spiritual *strongholds* in the next verse as *arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God* (10:5a). As Paul traveled all over the Mediterranean world, he encountered many types of unbelief supported by clever *arguments*, or "imagination." These ideas were speculations or theories that contradict God's Word.

Paul also encountered other *strongholds*, such as *every lofty opinion*, or "every high thing," which refers to unbiblical opinions that are declared as truth. Such opinions declare there is more than one way to heaven. Or, it's OK in God's sight for two men or two women to marry each other. Another opinion is the idea of reincarnation, which teaches that when you die, you just keep coming back until you get it right.

People must hear what the Bible teaches-*the knowledge of God*-in regard to such *arguments* and *lofty* opinions. These ideas must be confronted head-on. What do we read in Proverbs 21:22 about confronting the strongholds of our world?

Being competent includes focusing on the objective of spiritual warfare- changing opposing opinions to a biblical perspective. Paul puts it like this: take every thought captive to obey Christ (10:5b). To do that, we must use the two offensive spiritual weapons that are part of the whole armor of God that Paul writes about in Ephesians 6:11-18. What are these two weapons?

Ephesians 6:17b-c -

Ephesians 6:18a-b -

That's all we need in our spiritual arsenal: God's Word - which is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth - and prayer. These two weapons are more than enough to *destroy arguments and every lofty opinion and to take every thought captive to obey Christ*.

As we can see from these verses, spiritual warfare is basically a battle for our minds. Being prepared for this battle requires proficiency in using the Sword of the Spirit, the Bible. We can't fight error or false teaching without the truth of God's Word. That's why Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:15a-b: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed*. Then, what does he write in the rest of that verse (2 Timothy 2:15c)?

To win the spiritual war, we must be competent in handling God's Word and supplementing what the Bible declares by praying in the Spirit - as Christ would pray.

To win the spiritual war **be Christlike, be competent, and ...**

Be careful (10:6).

The competent soldier must be **careful** to avoid "friendly fire." "Friendly fire" is accidentally firing on your own soldiers and causing casualties. Satan loves to get Christians to fight among themselves and create losses from friendly fire. Many churches are destroyed this way. I have known of churches splitting from friendly fire over the color of carpet to be used in the worship center, the type of music to use in worship, etc. Be careful not to create spiritual casualties from friendly fire.

A competent soldier of the Cross waits until the enemy is clearly revealed. Therefore, Paul continues by writing: *being ready to punish every disobedience* (10:6a). The false teachers at Corinth who refuse to repent will be confronted by a "general" in Christ's army who is ready *to punish every disobedience*. Paul doesn't reveal what that punishment will be. However, undoubtedly, it will involve some kind of apostolic or church discipline when he arrives.

Paul makes it clear this will only happen *when your obedience is complete* (10:6b). This statement probably means he will not discipline until everyone has been heard. Then, it will be clear who stands for the truth and who does not. How does our Lord express this truth in Matthew 12:30?

When fighting a spiritual war, you are either with Christ or against Him. You can't straddle the fence or sit on the sidelines when confronting the moral issues of the day. Paul is being very careful and giving adequate time so the Corinthians can choose to be with Christ and His apostle or against them.

To win the spiritual war, **be Christlike, be competent, and be careful.**