

## A War Worth Fighting

2 Corinthians 10:1-11

*By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” when away!<sup>2</sup> I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.<sup>3</sup> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.<sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.<sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.<sup>6</sup> And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.*

*<sup>7</sup> You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.<sup>8</sup> For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.<sup>9</sup> I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters.<sup>10</sup> For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.”<sup>11</sup> Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.*

And you think that you have problems. You would not have wanted to trade places with the apostle Paul. Sure, Paul had his supporters and partners in ministry, but his list of enemies was as long as this ceiling is high. The Jews wanted him dead and tried their best to kill him on many occasions. The Romans eventually did kill him. However, physical suffering does not seem to have worn on Paul as much as the interpersonal fights. In the church in Corinth his main enemy were false apostles he nick-named the “superapostles.” Above all they were usurpers. We know that Paul started the church in Corinth from the very first convert. He spent a year and a half in that city building disciples and establishing the church. The entire eighteen months he ministered in Corinth he also made and sold tents for a living. He didn’t always have to work as a tentmaker. It seems that most churches supported his ministry with offerings, but not Corinth. Paul was fully devoted to this church—eighteen months of ministry, three visits and four letters—more time and effort spent on this church than on any other. After all of that, these superapostles came in and were preaching a false gospel, leading believers astray and

accomplishing it all by denigrating Paul's reputation. The way they caricatured him was exactly like this scene from the [Wizard of Oz](#).

The Wizard of Oz was all bark and no bite. At a distance, he was tough and scary, but up close he was timid and weak. This is precisely what they said about Paul. *I Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away!* If these superapostles could destroy Paul's reputation then they could destroy the gospel that he preached. Theirs' was a classic ad hominem attack—destroy the person and the message follows close behind. We are most familiar with this tactic when it comes to political ads on TV. They all follow the same script. Haunting music is played along with a demonized picture of the opposing candidate—who, in the Wizard of Oz analogy really is the Wicked Witch of the West. Then the music changes to sweet and uplifting while they show a video clip of their smiling candidate. With character attacks like this, the content of the commercials doesn't even matter because the music and the pictures have told the story of good vs. evil—our candidate is good and the other guy is evil. This was the age old struggle for power and influence but Paul's struggle was the most important of all because he was not fighting to defend himself—he was fighting to defend the gospel. That is a battle worth fighting.

The problem is that most of our fights are not about the gospel. Do you know how the community looks at Christians? We are known for two things—our potluck dinners and our fighting. We make the best tator-tot casseroles and we fight better than anyone else. Isn't this true? Isn't this sad? We mostly fight about unimportant things that have more to do with our own selfish desires than they do the pure gospel message. These are the saddest fights of all, but we also fight about important things—and sometimes we do need to engage in such fights. This morning I want to teach you how to have a good fight. There are three important questions for any good fight. How are you fighting? Who are you fighting? And why are you fighting?

First, let me explain briefly why I have skipped from chapter five to chapter ten. As part of our series through Genesis I preached on the second half of chapter six and chapter seven. A few years back I preached through chapters eight and nine. All of these messages are accessible online if you ever want to read them. I didn't feel the need to duplicate what I had covered before so I decided to move to the next section which is chapter ten.

### **How are you fighting?**

The first question to address is "How are you fighting." Have you ever seen an MMA fight? Mixed Martial Arts is the hottest sport since NASCAR. Boxing is no more and MMA is king of fighting world. Proponents of MMA say that it is much safer than boxing. If you've never seen one, there are four basic ways to win an MMA fight—knock out, tap out, choke out or points. Everyone knows what a knock out is. A tap out is when you get your opponent in such a painful position—usually an arm bar—that they tap out before you actually break their arm. A choke out is not actually choking the opponent but happens when you press your forearm against the veins in their neck cutting off the blood supply to their brain and causing them to pass out. I guess you could say that this is better than getting punched in the head until you are knocked out, but the whole thing seems quite brutal to me. But here is my point—even with all of the brutality, even MMA has strict rules. In fact, it has such strict rules precisely because it is so brutal. In the same way, *how* you fight as a Christian is vitally important.

Paul's method of fighting his opponent appears in the first verse. *By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.* As most of you know, Jesus said that the meek shall inherit the earth and gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. These are both character qualities that do not come naturally to us, that is why they are a fruit of a life lived by the Spirit. We can also understand how important these qualities would be in a good fight. It's one thing to be meek and gentle when everything is going along as normal, but it's something different altogether to be gentle and meek in the midst of a heated conflict.

I am not going to spend a long time explaining what these character qualities look like but it might be helpful to say a few things about what they are not. First of all, gentle and meek doesn't necessarily mean nice and calm. It is quite possible to metaphorically stab someone in the back with a smile on your face and a calm voice. In fact, someone who would stab you in the back will most likely feel happier once the dirty deed is done. To the untrained eye, this smile and this calm voice might appear to be meekness and gentleness, but they are not. Also, meekness and gentleness does not necessarily mean that you allow others to step all over you. It is possible to be bold and forceful while also behaving in a meek and gentle manner.

A good example is when Jesus cleared the money changers from the temple. When we think of this scene we tend to imagine Jesus in a mild rage, tearing through the temple looking a bit like a crazed person. What makes us think that he was yelling and screaming? The Bible does not tell us that he yelled. It doesn't even tell us that he was angry. We draw the conclusion that Jesus was extremely angry but that of course it was a sinless, righteous anger. He could have been angry and it is definitely possible for the Lord to have exhibited righteous indignation, but there is something in this story which leads me to a different conclusion.

Do you remember what Jesus did just prior to driving them out of the temple area? This story appears in all four gospels but only John tells us that Jesus made a whip out of cords. At the very least this tells us that his actions in the temple were premeditated. He sat down and wove together a whip of cords. I can imagine that while he busied himself making the whip that he quoted Scripture to himself. "Zeal for thy house will consume me" (Psalm 69:9). Holy, holy, holy. The whole earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne (Psalm 11:4). After the whip was completed, what do you think he did with it? He used it. He used it on the animals and he used it on the people. But is it even possible to whip someone and still practice meekness and gentleness? Let me ask all parents the same question. Is it possible to give your child a spanking while practicing meekness and gentleness? Not only is it possible, it is necessary to do so. The very worst thing you can do is become enraged while you are spanking your child. That could lead to a form of child abuse. We know that discipline is best applied during times when we are gentle and meek.

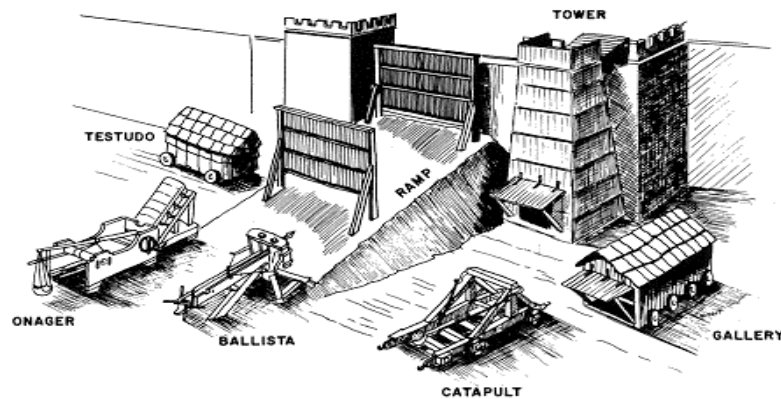
This fits nicely with Paul's intention. In verse one he told us that he was approaching this difficult situation by the meekness and gentleness of Christ but just six verses later he promised that *we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience.* Both Paul and Jesus were able to discipline others in a spirit of gentleness. It is both possible and necessary to be bold and committed and still be gentle and meek. In fact I would argue that the bolder the action the more

necessary the gentleness. If you are in a small skirmish or a fight for your life, these are the character qualities you must bring with you.

**Who are you fighting?** The second question we must answer is who are you fighting? This will become clear in a minute, but first let's make sure we notice all of the warfare terminology in this passage.

- *we do not wage war as the world does.*
- *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.*
- *On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*
- *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,*
- *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*
- *And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience*

Waging war, fighting battles, wielding weapons, demolishing strongholds, taking captives, punishing disobedience—this is probably the most military analogies in all of Paul's writing. Most of this warfare terminology is offensive in nature. When you wage war the implication is that you are going on the attack. Waging war is not what you do to defend a city but something you do to overtake a city. Demolishing strongholds is the exact term for a siege works. Armies have been using siege engines for thousands of years but no one did it better than the Romans. Let's take a look at some of their weapons of warfare.



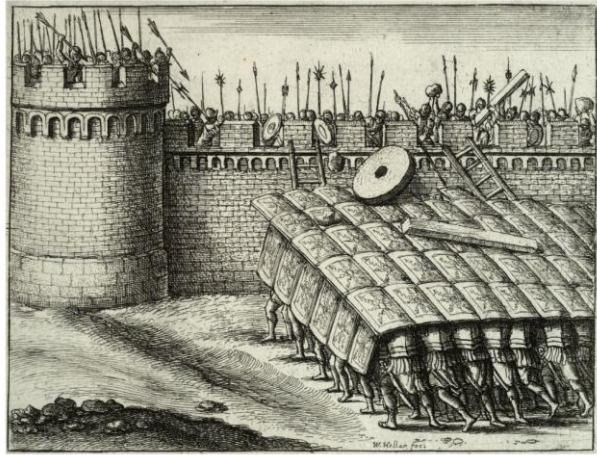
**ROMAN SIEGECRAFT AND WORKS**

to gain entrance over the walls of the city. The siege ramp pictured below is the actual ramp built by King Sennacherib when he defeated Judah in 701 BC. Obviously it would take a long time to build a ramp like this, but that is what we need to understand about siege engines as weapons of war. Unlike what you see in *The Lord of the Rings* and other Hollywood versions, an

The onager, ballista and catapult are all very similar in that they propel objects against the gates of a city. The ballista is more like a gigantic bow and arrow and the onager and catapult hurl heavy objects against and over the wall. For those who have seen *The Lord of the Rings*, the siege against Gondor is a great illustration. The siege tower and siege ramp are obviously meant



actual siege could take years. A fortified city was extremely difficult to conquer and a siege was typically a slow process and a strategic waiting game where battles were won because food, water and other supplies would run out inside the city.



One of the most effective siege weapons was the Testudo or “tortoise shell” formation invented and used by the Romans with great effectiveness. The shields both appeared and functioned like a tortoise shell giving tremendous protection to the foot soldiers. Here we can see what it looked like as a siege weapon.

Next I want to show you how all of this applies to this passage in 2 Corinthians. As we have seen, this passage is incredibly rich with warfare terminology and moreover, the terms used are offensive weapons which are specifically siege weapons meant to break through the gates of a fortified city. Verse five shows the end goal of this offensive fighting—we *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. The goal is to break through the city gates and take captives. But Paul is very clear that these are not walls of brick and mortar nor are the enemies flesh and blood.

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Now we can answer our second question—who are you fighting? Who is Paul fighting in this passage? We know that he is addressing the problem of the false apostles. They are the ones who likened him to the Wizard of Oz—powerful from a distance but weak up close. The false apostles were the ones who were leading the Christians in Corinth astray. The false apostles were the ones who were preaching a false gospel. They were clearly making trouble for Paul and more significantly, for the believers in Corinth. Paul did not spare words when he called them out in chapter eleven. *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for **Satan** himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Co 11.13-15).*

So who was Paul fighting? Clearly he was fighting the false apostles but underneath it all, Paul knew that the true enemy was Satan and the true warfare was spiritual. Here are a few verses from this letter which demonstrate the battle in which he was engaged.

2 Co 2.10-11 *If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, **in order that Satan might not outwit us.** For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

2 Co 4.4 ***The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers,** so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

2 Co 11.3 *But I am afraid that **just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning,** your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Paul does not develop a detailed instruction about spiritual warfare but it is clear enough that he sees the activity of Satan as potentially affecting everything in the Corinthian church. Satan impeded evangelism by blinding unbelievers, he fostered bitterness and a lack of forgiveness and he deceived them into believing a false gospel, thereby destroying their faith. The battle imagery that is so rich in chapter ten is implying an unseen, spiritual battle, as it says in Ephesians. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Eph 6:12). Think about it—Paul had this enormous battle with these false apostles ruining the church that he had planted and grown but he framed the battle in primarily spiritual terms. His enemy was not the false apostles per se but rather Satan.

If you have fought or are fighting battles in your life, it is absolutely essential that you realize that your enemy is not the person that is throwing rocks, the one who is fighting this battle according to the weapons of the world, but you are fighting Satan and your battle is a spiritual battle. Of course this does not mean that you ignore the person or pretend that they are not part of the problem. In the real world, they are part of the problem. As believers we need to continually apply all of the principles of Biblical conflict resolution. You cannot simply bury your head in the sand and pray, but neither can you focus all of your energy on the flesh and blood opponent that you face.

But the average Christian is not very good at spiritual warfare. Some believers are like Christian Don Quixote's, stabbing at invisible windmills and seeing a demon behind every bush. There is no doubt that some believers get carried away with what we generally refer to as spiritual warfare, but far too many of us ignore this invisible battle altogether. We have two basic deficiencies when it comes to spiritual warfare.

The first problem is that we see spiritual warfare as primarily defensive. We tend to focus on the shield of faith. *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.* (Eph.6:16). The shield is a defensive weapon but it is only one small part of our armor. The rest of the armor in Ephesians chapter six are offensive weapons. Furthermore, battle imagery in this passage is all offensive. Paul is describing siege engines. We are not to sit back and wait for the enemy to invade and conquer us but rather we

are engaged in an offensive battle where we storm the gates of the enemy. This is implied in Jesus' words to Peter. *You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matt. 16:18). Are gates an offensive or a defensive weapon? They are a defensive weapon, therefore the implication from Jesus' words is that the church is on the offensive. The gates cannot prevail because they will be attacked by offensive, spiritual weapons that have power to demolish strongholds. But often the best we can do is to hide behind our shields and wait for Satan to stop firing on us. If you use your shield of faith that is good, but it is not nearly sufficient.

The second serious deficiency in our spiritual warfare is that we engage in it all by ourselves. Unless your name is Ah-nold and you are from Calee-for-nee-ah and you live in a Hollywood movie, then you must never engage in spiritual warfare alone. Think again about the nature of a siege. Would you ever attack a castle wall all by yourself? Is it possible to maneuver a siege weapon without any help? It is obvious that one person cannot form a tortoise shell formation. I have to tell you, this is a truth that I have missed. I have always thought of spiritual warfare as an individual battle but now I am convinced that it is a corporate battle for the whole church. Such a battle was never meant to be fought alone. Can you imagine what could happen if the church joined together in fighting our common enemy? At the very least, we would stop fighting one another and join forces against our universal enemy. This is a war worth fighting for. We will spend next week figuring out how to do just this very thing.

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