
The Weapons of our Warfare

2 Corinthians 10:1-6¹

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What a world we live in! Our nice, comfortable, pseudo-Christian world no longer exists. Or at least, that is the way it seems. Maybe it never was what we thought it was. Maybe it is not what we are being told now, it is. But who would have thought that girls would have to go to court in order not to have to compete against a man pretending to be a girl?

And just in case some of you were wondering, I have decided to identify as an elf. I may soon dress mostly in green. I will get prosthetic ears and will investigate the possibility of having my ears altered and the lenses in my eyes recolored and reshaped. I don't know what to do about the height issue, but some things you just can't change. I have been researching swords and have been thinking about starting to wear one along with my clearly elven clothing. I really do double-dog dare anyone to challenge me. It is my right to identify as an elf if that is what I want to do.

Now that sounds and is, ridiculous. But that is just a sample of what the culture is doing. I used to say that I was probably the only truly African-American in any room. But now, that is no longer humorous because, well, people think I am serious. But wait... I am serious. I was born in Africa and I am an American citizen. But what was funny two years ago doesn't even raise an eyebrow now.

We are doing this series now because we have received a lot of questions about how to respond to questions and even people in these movements. We hope that these sermons will help you to be able to respond Biblically and wisely.

Our approach will not be rigid template, but as a guide for wrestling through the issues.

While the Bible may not speak directly on some contemporary subjects, the teaching and principles of the Bible helps us engage, interpret and be able to answer questions people ask. Sermons will be prepared to give some description and diagnosis of these issues while preparing a Biblical response to them.

Many of these issues are functional, though not formal religions. They have all the characteristics of a world view that has a supreme idea or value who is functionally their god. They would not see it that way. In fact, most would adamantly deny that there is any deity since that would imply accountability. Therefore, sometimes we will be answering these questions:

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What/who is their deity? Who or what is "worshipped"?

What is their source of authority?

Who are the "priests"?

What are the highest elements in their morality?

What is their eschatology, their theory of the future?

Over the first two or three weeks, we will be establishing some foundational truths that have to frame what we do. Without them, we will be doing evangelism largely as merely rational apologetics. That is not what the Bible would have us do. The apostle Paul will help us, arm us, with the proper weapons of our warfare.

A Humble Attitude (v. 1)

¹ 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!—

Paul was dealing with accusations against him. He models for us a deeply humble attitude when he engages these people. What we are thinking through in this series is largely about engaging unbelievers. Nevertheless, we really need the humility that is reflected here.

An Appeal from Christ's Character

Paul appeals with the meekness and gentleness of Christ to the Corinthian believers. He sets the standard for humility and meekness. The Corinthian church had mistaken Paul's meek and humble attitude for weakness. So he appeals to them in what they have been taught about Christ. We know so much more because we have the gospels. Christ was certainly meek and gentle, with those who were expressing faith and repentance. With the arrogant religious hypocrites, he leveled strong words and biting sarcasm and fearful doom in warnings.

A Denial of the Charge

Paul repeats their charge that he is two-faced. He is kind and gentle, maybe even weak when he is with them. Maybe he is fearful when he is there in contrast to the dynamic, powerful impressive way of their super-apostles. But when he is not face-to-face, he is hard, harsh and bold. This is what they accuse him of. Many of us know people like this: smile to your face and cut you to shreds in other conversations. They seem to charge him with both personal timidity and the use of worldly techniques in rhetoric.

A Biblical Strategy (v. 2–6)

Paul responds to concerns over why he is doing ministry the way he does. He insists that he has a Biblical strategy for ministry.

² 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. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

What must be Rejected (v. 2–3)

He does not depend upon the tactics of the flesh. We live in this present time, age and place which Paul calls the world, the flesh, the old. This is simply a physical reality. This is where culture and psychology and business strategies exist. This is the challenge of being immersed in our world and culture. Since it feels so right and so normal, it seems like we should use those strategies to do the work of the ministry.

Paul is emphatic that he has rejected reliance on the strategies, the strengths, ways of the world. He is not pursuing the work of the church to expand the kingdom of God using the weapons of the world. For Paul this primarily related to his “way” when he was with the Corinthian church. When he was meek with them and strong in writing he was not doing so driven by his appreciation or appropriation of fleshly strategies.

Don’t miss the astounding irony of the church at Corinth accusing Paul of being worldly. They who had allowed the world and its ways to influence and infiltrate the church had no grounds to call Paul out. This was a self-defensive mechanism designed to deflect Paul’s counsel and deny his commands.

This must give us real pause in our pragmatic world today. How much of the commonly adopted means and methods used in the ministry may simply be the appropriation and reliance on the flesh? They may be great and useful and productive strategies in the world. But what is designed to work well among sinners should not be the primary things we rely to work well among the saints. It is a sobering thought that our sophisticated systems of evangelism, promotion and growth are simply the natural product of the world’s wisdom and weapons.

When we discuss these issues with unbelievers, we must be careful about our tactics. Why am I having this conversation? What am I trying to prove? What is my ultimate aim? Am I trying to win the argument or am I trying to convey the truth? Will I be more or less able to speak the gospel to this person when this discussion is finished? Will I compromise the truth in order maintain a relationship? When is it right to condemn an unbeliever?

These are all important questions you have to wrestle with if you are going to talk to unbelievers about many of the contemporary, cultural expressions of very old and ancient sins. Some of the issues are more difficult partly because so many Christian leaders and their followers have brought the error over into the

church. Social justice theory and practice would be a prime example. We have written and preached on our stance toward that issue.

You must be prepared to be misunderstood. There were many motivations and agendas that caused people to misunderstand Paul. Unbelievers misunderstood him and charged him with many false accusations. Christians also misunderstood him. They often tried to deflect the authority of his preaching and teaching by attributing false motivations to him. So, do not be surprised then when both unbelievers and believers charge you with false motivations. This is normal. This is to be expected. I don't know why, but so many Christians crave being accepted by and approved by unbelievers. The result is that the rejection that comes often tempts us to ungodly fear or anger.

We must understand the limited value of discussion and debate with unbelievers. Jesus does it largely with religious leaders who are teaching error and leading people astray – think, the Pharisees. He engages them with fierce logic, penetrating questions and sometimes, devastating sarcasm. But it is always with truth. It is always in the service of God's glory. Too often, we are serving our selves, our defense, our reputation, our standing. You cannot serve God and self at the same time. God's kingdom is not expanded in a war to protect or promote our selfdom.

Realize that sinners and the way they justify their sin are not arguing against you. They are arguing against God. Now if you have it wrong or can't say it clearly or have your own sinful emotions all tangled up in it, then you will probably not be defending truth. To tell the truth, to defend the truth, you have to know the truth. This part of the purpose of this series. We aim to give you a brief summary what is being believed, desired and practiced in the issue. We also intend to give you some foundational truth that answers it.

In doing so, we want you armed with truth but not relying on the tactics and strategies of the flesh to win the argument.

What must be Employed (v. 4–6)

What then do we do? Why even do this series? Paul is very concerned to explain what he is actually doing and why. These guide and guard us as well.

⁴ We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. ⁵ We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. ⁶ And after you have become fully obedient, we will punish everyone who remains disobedient. [New Living Translation, NLT]

He uses God's mighty weapons to knock down the strongholds of false thinking. This is one of the most important verses for understanding what tools and strategies are to be used in the church. This is related both to evangelism and to edification.

These verses have been widely misused down through the last century. They do not refer to Satanic strongholds or geographic locations held as territory by demonic forces. We are not employing worldly strategies. But neither are we magicians using the power of the Spirit to zap demonic forces encamped in towns and cities.

Well, what is this about then? What is Paul saying that he and we must employ in ministry? This about the power of God through the Word of God preached by the servant of God to destroy error, false thinking and worldly philosophies. Paul is certainly seeing the value of going after them in terms of the gospel to the world. But what Paul is primarily concerned about is how these errors and false thinking have permeated the church.

To deal with the wrong thinking, Paul sets for us some standards. These are what he was encountering in the unrepentant opponents to him. Taking our cue from Paul, I want to state these as declarations and affirmations of what we aim to do in following his example. If we are defending the faith with unbelievers, these must be in play. If we are confronting and correcting believers, they must be true of our attitudes and actions as well.

We rely on God's power.

All true lasting spiritual change comes as a result of God at work. Natural human reasoning may be used by God to effect transformation. But natural human reasoning apart from God's power can only affect the natural man. So while we engage both believers and unbelievers on the myths, lies and errors that are a part of the issues we will be dealing with, we do so relying on God's power to grant faith and repentance. Without God's power changing people, it is merely human change and may even lead the person into deeper error.

We answer and destroy false thinking.

In our preaching, teaching, counseling and discipling, we expose the error and explain the truth so people may know God truly. Christians cannot live in a way that is pleasing to God when they believe error. You cannot live the Christian life by myths. You cannot engage the world with what is not true. So, part of what we do in evangelism, in our preaching and teaching, is to break down the walls of error that people believe and hide in.

Recognize that people's false thinking are fortresses. That means they often have well-constructed defenses and are powerfully defended. Unbelievers' strongholds often appear to be strong and unassailable. But, often bits of truth mingled with bits of error are held together at places by frail logic and at other places by persuasive but dangerous arguments. But these are all built on sand. They will eventually crumble.

We help them to control their thinking.

Christians need to learn to discipline their minds so that they control their thinking with the aim of obeying Jesus. A disciplined mind is not the final goal. Right thinking is always to lead to submission to Christ.

But Christians are often weak and undisciplined in their thinking. They are unstable. They are susceptible to persuasive, worldly arguments. They are not so grounded in truth that they can see the errors for what they are. They are blown about by every wind of false doctrine and worldly thinking. There is a kind discipline of our minds, of the flow of words in our hearts, that is required to produce godliness. It is necessary in an age in which errors are so prevalent and so easily accessed.

We are prepared to deal with unrepentant disobedience.

Those who refuse to repent will be dealt with. Paul was warning the church that their current situation had to be addressed. Thank God for those who heard and heeded the Word of God through the writing of Paul. But the unrepentant who continued to resist Paul and his Biblical authority would be dealt with. This was beginning at this point in the letter with escalating pressure.

Intentionally, rebelliously, high-handedly holding to error has consequences. For unbelievers they run into the natural consequences of living in God's world. They face the present and eternal wrath of God. But, because ideas and errors have consequences, unbelievers take their worlds down with them. Make no mistake, none of what seems so real, so pressing, so indomitable now can last. Social justice will fail. Socialism will fail. Fascism will fail. Democracy will fail. All the varied expressions and experiences of homosexuality will fail. And any christian who thinks these ideas are true and are the solution to fall is sadly deceived. There is no utopia. This is not heaven. We live in an Ecclesiastes world. Get over it!

Reflect and Respond

Therefore, we must use the Word of God rightly. We must use logic and argument dependent on the power of the Spirit. But we must deconstruct the fortresses and towers of error so that people will be able to subject the process and the content of their thinking to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In closing, let me remind you of the trajectory of the world's wisdom, the world's ways. Here is Romans 1:18–2:4 in the New Living Translation.

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

Our response? We say with Paul: Romans 1:16-17

[We are] I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes – the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person [lives]."