



Spiritual Warfare

Part 3: Truth Or Territory?

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We have reached the point in this series¹ where we need to define “spiritual warfare.” Spiritual warfare is the most misunderstood subject in all of modern evangelicalism. When most Christians hear or read the words “spiritual warfare,” they envision some sort of mystical hand-to-hand combat that is waged with demons by certain types of prayers, mantras, incantations, or practices such as “binding Satan,” “praying a hedge of thorns,” exorcisms, or “rebuking demons” in an attempt to take territory from Satan and claim it for Christ.

Not only are these specific practices not the least bit biblical,² but neither is the notion that spiritual warfare involves direct interaction against demons in order to gain spiritual or physical territory.

We will turn to Scripture for a description of spiritual warfare and allow the Bible to define this warfare for us. We cannot adopt occultic, mystical practices or worldviews. We are not free to make up practices that we think would be effective in the spiritual battle. We can only turn to the Bible and allow God to tell us what constitutes *real* spiritual warfare. Consequently, any practice not founded upon a sound interpretation of Biblical texts in their context must be rejected. All our thinking and understanding of spiritual warfare must be grounded on Scripture.

We turn then to a familiar passage; one that is often quoted but seldom rightly understood - **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**, “**For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought**

captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”

Perhaps you were expecting **Ephesians 6** and a discussion on the armor of God, or some passage from the gospels where Jesus commanded and exorcised demons. We will deal with those passages in time, but we begin at a more foundational level and answer the question: “What is spiritual warfare?”

In **2 Corinthians 10**, the Apostle Paul defines and describes the essence of spiritual warfare. In these verses, he tells us **how** we fight, **what** we fight and **why** we fight. In **2 Corinthians 10**, we have a definition and description of spiritual warfare which plays a critical role in equipping us to engage our enemy.

First A Little Background

As with any Bible passage, we need to give some attention to the context of this passage to make sure we are rightly understanding the meaning of the passage.

Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** as a defense of himself, his co-workers and his ministry. After writing **1 Corinthians**, some people in the church at Corinth had started what can only be described as a character assassination campaign against Paul. There were men in Corinth who claimed to be apostles. They were apparently very talented, gifted, and charismatic men whose constant attacks on Paul swayed the hearts and loyalties of the Corinthian believers.

These false teachers impugned Paul's motives, claiming he was only in ministry for the money. They said that Paul lacked integrity, suggesting he was a hypocrite who said one thing and did another.

Even the people that worked and served with Paul were not immune from their attacks. These charlatans attacked Titus and impugned his motives as well, claiming that

1 Previous articles in this series are available at our website: kootenaichurch.org.
2 We will examine these practices and the passages that are used to support them in coming articles.

neither Paul nor Titus had a God-given authority. They mocked Paul's physical appearance, his abilities, and his preaching.

Paul responded with a blistering description of these men as "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."³ He said that since Satan appears as an angel of light, so too his [Satan's] servants would likewise appear as servants of Christ. Rather than being messengers of Christ, they were, in reality, demonically inspired and empowered false teachers - messengers from Satan.⁴

Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** to defend himself and his co-workers against the attacks of the false teachers. He defended Titus, who traveled with him, reminding the Corinthians of Titus's integrity, willingness to work, and blameless life. He defended his own apostleship, authority, power, ministry, conduct, motives, and, most importantly, the message of the gospel - which Paul contended was the truth.

Occasionally Paul quoted his Corinthian critics. For instance, **2 Corinthians 10:8-10**, "**For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.'**"

His critics were saying, "Paul sure can write a strong letter for being such a weak and unimpressive person. He's not so tough. He is not even that great of an orator. He is contemptible and his speech is pathetic."

Paul was planning a trip to Corinth to deal with these issues in person, though he certainly didn't want to. In fact, he hoped that the Corinthians would deal with this nightmare before Paul ever arrived.

In the beginning of this chapter Paul said, "**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! I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh**" (**2 Co 10:1-2**).

If they said Paul was strong in his letters, wait till the little man shows up in Corinth! He told them in verse 2, that his hope was that he would not **need** to be as bold and strong

3 **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**

4 I believe that these false teachers, and one in particular, was Paul's "thorn in the flesh." These were messengers of Satan who proved a constant source of pain for Paul.

in confronting them as he was intending to be. This was a warning! "You deal with this situation before I arrive or I will deal with it, and if I deal with it, you are not going to like it!"

In verse 6, Paul said he was "**ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.**" The "obedience" that Paul had in mind in this Corinthian situation was a wholesale rejection of these men, their methods, and their attacks on Paul. If the church was willing to reject these men and reaffirm Paul and his message and ministry, then Paul would come and punish the disobedience of these men.

In verse 2, Paul said he was coming and it was not going to be pretty. In verse 6, Paul said that he was coming to punish all disobedience. Sandwiched in between those verses is this text on spiritual warfare. In verses 3-5 Paul drew a stark contrast between his method of ministry and that of these "other men." Paul describes his own ministry, contrasting it with the ministry of these false teachers.

With all that context and background, let's look at these verses in detail and see *how we fight, what we fight, and why we fight.*

How Do We Fight?

The false teachers in Corinth claimed that Paul's methodology and tactics in ministry were fleshly and worldly. They charged Paul's ministry with "not spiritual enough." They said it was "fleshly" and wasn't dealing with real spiritual issues. According to them, Paul wasn't doing real spiritual battle, but only engaging on a fleshly level.

He answered in verse 3, "**For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.**"

The word "flesh" here is not used in its ethical or moral sense. Paul is not saying we walk "carnally" or "immorally." It is used here in its normal, more literal sense, meaning "we are normal men." He simply meant that he participated in normal human existence with all of its inherent limitations. Fortunately, our method of doing battle is not limited by our physical nature or our human frailties. We do not wage war *merely* according to the flesh.⁵

5 This passage is **loaded** with military imagery. The warfare imagery was a favorite for Paul. Ephesians 6 contains a lot of warfare imagery and the battle armor of a Roman Soldier is used as an object lesson for Christian battle. We see similar imagery in **2 Timothy 2:3-4**, "**Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.**" See also **2 Timothy 4:7** and **Jude 3** for references to fighting. Paul viewed the Christian life as one long battle, one long

In order to fight this fight, we have been given certain weapons which are to be used in this spiritual warfare. Since the battle we fight is not a physical battle, but a spiritual one, the weapons we employ are likewise spiritual and not physical. When Paul says that the **“weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh”** he means that they are *not of human making or design*. We have Heavenly weapons, given by God for the advancement of truth, not designed by men for the defense of territory.

Paul highlighted a very real temptation that we are often faced with, namely to approach our life, walk, ministry, or warfare from a purely human vantage point. We walk in this world and we are constantly bombarded with the best of human wisdom, human methodologies, human thinking and worldly ways. We are surrounded by new and improved theories of how ministry is to be done, how demons are to be fought, how the Christian life is to be lived. We are often told that we can accomplish divine ends with worldly means. Nothing could be further from the truth!

In coming articles you will see how many methods of spiritual warfare get adopted and employed which are completely of men's making and not God-given at all. Spiritual warfare “how to manuals” are filled with tactics and methods which are birthed in the minds and thinking of men and demons and not derived from the Word of God. We have to make sure that our “weapons” are not of human origin.

Though we walk here in the flesh, we do not use fleshly means to accomplish God's end. A read through **1 and 2 Corinthians** gives us some examples of “fleshly weapons.” The Corinthians trusted in human wisdom and human understanding which they elevated above divine wisdom. They cherished displays of human abilities, gifts, and talents. They criticized Paul because he was not as gifted in oratory as others. They formed divisions around different teachers and boasted in their own abilities. They sought approval from men and large followings. These are the types of fleshly weapons Paul would reject. In fact, in **1 Corinthians 1**, Paul revealed that when he came to Corinth, he purposely refused to engage the Corinthians on that level, even though he knew that he could gain a following if he had adopted such man-centered methods of ministry. Instead, he opted for the *foolishness of preaching* and the wisdom of God, the very opposite of what was sure to draw a following in Corinth.⁶

Satan loves to get us to try to use methods that are fleshly; gimmicks, campaigns, and publicity stunts - methods

of our own making - and to abandon the weapons that God gives us which are **“divinely powerful.”**

Do you notice in this passage that Paul does not tell us what our weapons are? He does give us some clues. So far we have seen three things about our weapons.

First, they are spiritual not fleshly.

Second, the weapons are mighty in God. They pack divine power. This is not true of any human methodology or wisdom; they never carry divine power.

Third, these weapons destroy strongholds. They destroy fortresses. They are **“divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses”** (v. 4).

You might still be wondering what these weapons are. What spiritual weapon do we have which is given by God, endued with His power, and can destroy “fortresses”? Before we can answer that, we have to find out what “fortresses” we are destroying.

What Do We Fight?

What is it that we are fighting? What is the target? Are we fighting the ACLU, the homosexual lobby, abortion doctors, political parties? What is our enemy? What are these fortresses that we are to destroy in spiritual warfare?

Some would say that these “fortresses” are demonic strongholds, heavenly power structures, generational curses, incantations, demon hierarchies. They would therefore conclude that our weapons involve methods and means which are intended to weaken demonic power, hinder the devil, release people from curses, pray down these strongholds and reverse or ward off spirits.

How does Paul describe these “fortresses”? He says that we are destroying **“speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** He uses the words “speculations,” “knowledge of God,” and “thought.” Those three words tell us all we need to know about the nature of spiritual warfare.

The words “speculations” or “arguments” (NIV, NKJV) are words that mean “thoughts” or “imagination.” It refers to “reasonings” or “thought processes.” The fortresses that we are destroying are not physical fortresses. They are not demonic mantras, spells, or curses. They are not demonic hierarchical power structures. The fortresses are **mental** fortresses. We destroy “thoughts” and “reasonings.”

The next phrase further describes these fortresses as *“every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”* “Lofty thing” shows the *pride* of these mental fortresses. The term “lofty thing” was used to describe the towers that would

struggle, a constant fight.

6 **1 Corinthians 1:18-2:9.**

encompass military fortresses. The towers would rise high into the sky and provide defense.

These mental fortresses are “**against**” the knowledge of God. Paul is not just describing innocent thoughts. He is talking about mental fortresses, reasonings of the human heart, prideful, self-reliant, man-centered human philosophies and speculations. The war we wage is against the proud, lofty, God-defying speculations of the human heart that are raised up in opposition to the true knowledge of God.

Mankind is surrounded by the knowledge of God. He has knowledge of God in creation and he chooses to suppress that truth in unrighteousness.⁷ Men have knowledge of God revealed in their conscience which constantly accuses them of breaking the law of God written on their hearts.⁸ While not hearing any audible voice, man is surrounded by God's creation which ceaselessly testifies to its Creator.⁹ How does man respond to the light of creation and conscience? He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness because he loves darkness rather than light.¹⁰ Man's intellect is darkened and his mind is at enmity against God.¹¹ Instead of submitting to the truth, men erect mental fortresses which keep him hostage and safe in his unbelief. They hold up in their lofty, pride-filled thinking which insulates them *against* the knowledge of God. These fortresses consist of worldly arguments, reasonings, science (falsely so called), thoughts, and philosophies which militantly stand raised up, lifted up hostile to God and the true knowledge of Him.

Wishing to be the center of his own self-sufficient universe, man in his unregenerate state does not want to turn from his sin or submit his pride-filled heart to the Sovereign God. He holds himself hostage in his mental fortress surrounded by his “reasons” that God does not exist. His towers of “philosophy,” “knowledge,” “science,” and “evolution” form his defense against the truth.

To the unregenerate man, insulated from the knowledge of God by his mental fortress, the preaching of the cross is foolishness.¹² Men, in partnership with the forces of darkness, erect all kinds of “speculations” and “lofty thoughts” against the truth. Evolution, atheism, moral relativism, tolerance, political correctness, theological liberalism, rationalism, naturalism, humanism and many others are examples of such Satanic deceptions erected in the minds and hearts of men.

7 Romans 1:21ff.

8 Romans 2:12-16.

9 Psalm 19:1-6.

10 John 3:19-21; Romans 1:18ff.

11 Romans 8:6-8.

12 1 Corinthians 1:18ff.

Man willingly believes anything but the truth and he uses the lies offered by Satan to build the bulwarks. Satan is pleased because he works to entrench men in error while blinding them to the truth. Man loves that darkness and hates the light and so he gladly settles in behind his lofty imaginations and speculations.

Philip Hughes describes Christian warfare this way: “*Christian warfare is aimed at the casting down of the reasonings which are the strongholds whereby the unbelieving mind seeks to fortify itself against the truths of human depravity and divine grace, and at the casting down also of every proud bulwark raised high against the knowledge of God.*”

There is a war being waged for the truth. Satan, the great liar and deceiver from the beginning, deceives men with his crafty lies. He and his host of demon helpers are constantly promoting, teaching, and advancing their lies. These lies are the proud speculations of the human mind and heart.

We are at war over truth! Spiritual warfare is a truth war. We fight lies by advancing truth. When truth advances, God is glorified and the forces of darkness suffer defeat.

How do we fight? We fight a spiritual war with spiritual weapons. What are we fighting? We are fighting the reasonings, thoughts, and speculations of error erected in the hearts of men. Now a related question: **What is our weapon?**

What have we been given by God that He promises is “**mighty in God for the destruction of fortresses?**” What does God use to destroy error and advance truth? What contains divine truth able to pierce right to the heart, bring conviction, remove blindness, destroy human wisdom, confound the wise and bring people to a knowledge of the truth? The gospel of truth - the Word of God.

The gospel and the word of God are **the means** of waging true spiritual warfare. Once we understand that true spiritual warfare is a war over the truth, then we are left with little doubt as to the identity of our weapon. It is the gospel of truth contained in the Word of truth.

With this understanding as a background read the following familiar verses: **Romans 1:16**, “For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the **power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes. . .”. **1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24**, “For the **word of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power of God**. For it is written, ‘I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since

the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the **message preached** to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we **preach** Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power** of God and the wisdom of God.”

Can you see the spiritual warfare language in that passage? God destroys human wisdom which is against the knowledge of God. He does this through the Word preached, the gospel which is powerful for the destruction of these fortresses and powerful under God to bring every thought captive to Christ.

God does not use fleshly methods of man's making to wage this spiritual warfare. God uses the one tool that He has endued with divine power - His Word. The preaching of the Word and the preaching of the gospel is certainly not a fleshly weapon of human origin relying upon the wisdom of man for its effectiveness! It is precisely the weapon of truth which is “not according to the flesh.”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, **proclaiming to you the testimony of God.**¹³ For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the **Spirit and of power**, so that your faith would not rest on **the wisdom of men**, but on the **power of God.**”

In **2 Corinthians 6:3** Paul was defending his ministry so that it “**would not be discredited.**” He described what he had endured in his ministry and yet in the midst of “afflictions,” “hardships,” and “distresses,” Paul's ministry was “in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the **Holy Spirit**, in genuine love, **in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left.** . . .” (**2 Corinthians 6:3-7**).

One of the elements of the armor of God is the “**sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.**”¹⁴ Paul was a true and effective warrior in the spiritual realm. He was always concerned with the truth of the gospel and its faithful proclamation. In the context of discussing spiritual warfare Paul requested prayer from the Ephesians that “**utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,**

¹³ Those would have been fleshly weapons.

¹⁴ Ephesians 6:17.

for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”¹⁵

Gospel proclamation is powerful in God unto salvation. It delivers people from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, from error to truth, from Satan to God.

Why Do We Fight?

Our goal is that “**every thought might be made captive to the obedience of Christ**” (**2 Corinthians 10:5**). In this final verse, the word for “thought” is different than the word at the beginning of our passage translated there as “speculation.” This was a word used to describe the motive and intent of the mind. You could say we are fighting in order to bring every intention, every thought and every device of the mind into obedience to Christ.

Who are we taking captive? We are taking as captives the very ones who once locked themselves in their mental fortresses. Once disobedient to Christ, held up in their castle of lies, the gospel is mighty in God to destroy their vain speculations and make them prisoners of Christ.

Why Is This Important?

This biblical description of spiritual warfare is quite different than that which is taught in most Christian churches today. We are told that true spiritual warfare is hand-to-hand combat with demons, casting spells, praying certain prayers, and taking territory from Satan. True spiritual warfare is not a battle for territory but a battle over truth.

Ironically, while the modern church seems preoccupied with battling demons, it has developed a complete apathy toward the truth. The modern church's complete disregard for truth has handicapped its ability to wage real spiritual warfare. The church has laid aside its one God-given weapon in favor of fleshly manmade weapons which can never tear down the mental fortresses in which men are held captive.

It is not uncommon to turn on Christian TV or radio and hear Satan being bound, rebuked, and exorcised. Churches host 24 hour prayer vigils and practice spiritual mapping. “Deliverance Ministries” abound, and yet what is the state of the church?

Most churches are *filled* with “Christians” who cannot articulate the gospel to save their life. They tolerate false teachers by the dozens and support their ministries. The modern church has lost its ability and even willingness to discern between truth and error.

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:18-20.

Churches are not interested in standing for the truth or preaching and teaching the truth. We are told that truth divides and needlessly offends people. Instead we should focus on unity, love, purpose, and more positive things. Tough subjects like sin, hell, wrath, judgment, repentance and the righteousness of God are not only neglected but avoided entirely.

Could Satan be more pleased with the modern fascination of the church? I doubt it. You can "bind Satan" all day long, He doesn't care; just so long as you do not share the gospel, stand for truth or assault the errors and lies of his strongholds. You can rebuke Him until you are blue in the face and he will go right along deceiving multitudes. He doesn't care; just so long as your love and focus is not the truth, sound doctrine, and preaching the gospel! Binding Satan and rebuking Satan are completely useless practices that accomplish absolutely nothing. They are unbiblical practices, manufactured in the minds of men for a church that has abandoned its call to be the "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Satan loves a church full of people ignorant of the gospel, who are apathetic about its defense. He thrives in churches where the lines between right and wrong, truth and error are blurred and ignored. He rejoices when he hears church leaders say that we should not concern ourselves with issues of truth and doctrine. He delights in Christians who think that truth should be sacrificed for the sake of unity and love. He loves Christians who are ignorant of the truth, for those are the most ineffective warriors of all.

So what is "spiritual warfare?" How do we define it? Is it exorcisms, deliverance ministries, confessing the sins of your ancestors, and renouncing generational curses? Is it rebuking Satan, binding Satan, and casting demons into pits? Is it praying down territorial spirits and claiming places and persons for God in the blood of Christ? No! No! A thousand times no!

Spiritual warfare is the bold proclamation of the truth of the gospel to lost sinners. The gospel, and the gospel alone, is powerful in God to destroy their anti-God fortresses composed of Satan's lies. It delivers them from the kingdom of darkness and the dominion of Satan. We must proclaim and defend the truth **"to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith"** in Christ.¹⁶ Spiritual warfare is a battle over truth not territory. It is not hand-to-hand combat with demons, but the proclamation and defense of the truth of

¹⁶ Acts 26:17-18.

God.

We are in the business of setting men free by making them captives of Christ. We use the only divinely powerful weapon in our arsenal which is the truth of the gospel and we proclaim it boldly and watch the strongholds crumble. We proclaim, preach, teach, stand for and defend the truth so that the proud, unregenerate, sinful man will see his isms, arguments, rationalizations, and worldly wise philosophies come crumbling down around him. He is left without excuse, naked before the truth of God and God's Word. Satan's lies are exposed and destroyed by the truth. This is true spiritual warfare - a battle of truth!

Now go out and "fight the good fight!"

Without Wax-

