

SERIES: Power through Weakness

SERMON: When you Go to War, Use the Right Weapons

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus

DATE: February 12, 2006

For the past two weeks we have been examining a section of 2 Corinthian (chapters 8 and 9) in which the Apostle Paul addresses the issue of generous giving, especially to the poor. It's related to the rest of the book in that the reason he's having to address the subject is that certain leaders have come into the church after he founded it, undermined his authority, and caused the people to neglect the faith promises they had made a year earlier to the poor, persecuted Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Now in chapter 10 Paul decides it's time to take these false teachers and antagonists on and expose them for who they really are. No more Mr. Nice Guy. In the next two chapters he will be very confrontational, accusing them of preaching another Jesus and a different Gospel; he will even call them false apostles, deceitful workmen who are masquerading as apostles of Christ. Paul would never choose to be so blunt if the Gospel itself were not at stake. But it is. Look at the first verse of our chapter: "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! 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."

Now it's clear from these words that Paul has been accused by his detractors of being a coward. In fact, he quotes them directly in verse 10: "For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.' 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." They had mistaken his meekness and gentleness for wimpiness. Christ was also misread the same way, but when the situation called for it, Jesus could be tough, as witnessed by the money-changers in the temple. The time has come for Paul to be tough as well.

What is it that brings him to this conclusion? It's the recognition that some in the church are operating by the standards of this world. They have abandoned the standards of righteousness, holiness, godliness, and honesty, and in their place have adopted the standards the world uses. What standards? Well, he doesn't list them, apparently assuming his readers know what he's talking about. I am fairly sure Paul is speaking of such things as tolerance of sinful behavior, relativism, humanism, pride, self-absorption, materialism—the very things that seem to be of such high value in our own culture.

But don't we have to function by the standards of the world, don't we have to participate in our culture and society? We can't isolate ourselves and adopt some other-worldly perspective and survive, can we? Here is Paul's response, verse 3: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does." The clear implication is that ...

There is a spiritual battle, a war, being waged for the hearts and minds of God's people.

We hear a lot about spiritual warfare in some Christian circles today. There are books and seminars and special ministries that are dedicated to wrestling with Satan and his demons and promising victory over principalities and powers to the believer who incorporates certain principles or methodologies. Perhaps no passage of Scripture is quoted more often by those

enamored with this kind of spiritual warfare than verses 3-5 of 2 Cor. 10:

For though we live in the world, 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, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

But I don't think this passage is speaking about demon possession and occult activity and exorcisms—direct warfare with Satan and his demons. It's not that I doubt that such spiritual warfare exists; I'm just saying this passage isn't specifically about that. Rather it's about the battle for the hearts and minds of God's people. It's about the battle of world-views that is raging in our culture. Certainly, Satan is active in this battle and he is behind some of the godless world-views, but I fear that when we focus on demon Satanism and demonism, we tend to miss the more obvious and common manifestations of spiritual warfare in our culture.

Everyone of you has heard about the rage and violence that has erupted all over the Muslim world for the past two weeks—instigated by some cartoons published in a Danish newspaper last August that pictured the prophet Mohammed. In one he is wearing a turban shaped like a bomb; in another he is telling the mullahs to quit sending suicide bombers to their death because they're all out of virgins up in heaven (of course, this is a reference to the absurd and blasphemous Muslim teaching that suicide bombers are promised 72 virgins for their martyrdom). These cartoons are satirical and tasteless, as are most political cartoons these days, and we could debate the appropriateness of printing them. But there is no doubt that they have pushed into bold relief the clash of civilizations that exists between the world of Islam and the free world. This, friends, is spiritual warfare—a battle of world-views.

But while this development is momentous on the international political scene, there are other world-view clashes that are probably even more important and relevant to us and our children. The clash between philosophical naturalism and intelligent design is more important. The clash between the culture of life and the culture of death (abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, etc.) is more important. The clash between inclusive and exclusive religious claims is more important (i.e. must we grant equal status to all spiritual views, or is Jesus the only Way?).

Paul has introduced the notion that there is a battle for the hearts and minds of God's people, and immediately he moves to the question of how we are fighting that battle:

Many are fighting this battle using the weapons of the world. (3) “We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” I do not see these words as a simple declarative statement, but rather as an exhortation: “we *must not* wage war as the world does; the weapons we use *must not* be the weapons of the world.” He wouldn't even say this if it weren't a fact that many are actually waging war with worldly weapons. Unfortunately, Paul doesn't specifically delineate what these weapons are, so he must have it obvious to his readers. They knew what he was talking about, but do we?

I want to suggest to you some of the key weapon systems the world uses and then ask the question, “Is the church ever inclined to borrow these?” One of those weapons the world uses to get its world view across and to silence its critics is intimidation and belligerence. I don’t know if you saw the speech Attorney General Alberto Gonzales gave at Georgetown University Law School last week. Many of these brilliant law students, the cream of the crop intellectually, stood up during his speech and turned their backs on him. Some wore hoods and held up signs of protest. Compared to the typical protests on elite campuses, however, this one was quite civil. More often conservative speaker are shouted down so they can’t even be heard. Come to think of it, the way radical students on the typical campus react to views they don’t like is quite similar to how the Muslim world reacted to those cartoons. Isn’t that curious?

But I’m more interested in the question, “Do professing Christians ever borrow intimidation and belligerence as tools of *their* trade?” What about the Phelps family protests, or Pat Robertson suggesting that the United States assassinate the President of Venezuela, or even some of the uglier abortion protests?

Legal action is another favorite weapon of the world. It seems sometimes that the first reaction to almost any problem is to pass a law. And if that doesn’t get the desired result, then sue, for the courts will often grant what the legislatures are too timid to give. The Economist says that “America has 281 lawyers for every 100,000 people, compared to Britain with 94, 33 in France and a mere 7 in Japan.”¹ This is because we have developed the frame of mind that virtually every moral, social, economic, and racial problem must have a legal solution.

And again I ask, “How often does the church seek redress in legislation or the courts?” Do we really think the answer to human addictions and twisted values is found in passing more laws—against pornography, gambling, abortion, drugs, you name it? There’s no question that just laws are essential to a civilized society, and legal redress is an important right, but friends, even a perfect set of laws is not going to eliminate crime or evil. Jesus urged His followers to be slow in going to court.

Boycotts are another weapon that is a favorite of the world. The gay rights lobby has used this very effectively to advance their agenda, threatening to use their considerable economic power to put any business out of business if they don’t offer full benefits irrespective of sexual orientation. The church has watched this and seen how effective it is, and sure enough has adopted its own boycotts, like that of Disney World. Now frankly, I boycott a lot of stores, and restaurants, and TV channels; I simply don’t do business with those whose business practices or products I disagree with. You probably do the same. But that’s different from organizing public protests and trying to get the entire Christian community to put someone out of business. I ask you, “Is that something Jesus would do? Are these the weapons we see the Apostles using in the spiritual battle?”

Thursday morning there was an editorial in the Eagle, written by our own Jeff Syrios. It was a powerful and convicting statement, and I want to read part of it:

Get us evangelicals mad, and you’ll have hell to pay.

Just tell your employees that “Merry Christians” is out and “Happy Holidays” is in, and we’ll stop buying your stuff. Try airing a blasphemous television show about a struggling priest named Daniel, and we’ll pressure you with a letter writing campaign. If you really want a fight, take another liberal step toward that U. S. Supreme Court nominee, and prepare for the full weight of our conservative ire.

As a political force, American evangelicals have come into their own. But... I am increasingly concerned about the message we are sending and the effect we are having.

Christians are called to influence the world. Believers are commissioned to redeem culture as well as make disciples of all men. Jesus taught his followers to practice their faith in the same way that salt is rubbed into meat...

But the means to the end cannot be devoid of virtue, and the Christian’s call to cultural redemption does not allow for an all-out, ears-back... assault on culture’s depravity. For with truth comes power, which, if not accompanied by grace, can manifest itself in arrogance and self-righteous judgment...

Christians must confront the moral decay in our culture...

But Christians must be cautious in handling the truth. While truth speaks of power, it also shouts of grace.

Another weapon the world uses to sell its standards is marketing. Most of you watched the Super Bowl ads last Sunday even if you didn’t watch the game. Some were clever, some bizarre (I don’t think I’ll ever be able to eat a Whopper again!), but all were designed to get you to buy something you wouldn’t otherwise buy. We are bombarded daily, hourly, with hundreds of marketing messages. Fortunately, this hasn’t entered the church. Good luck (as Calvin would say)! The fact is, some huge churches have been built almost entirely on Madison Avenue marketing techniques. I’m not suggesting that marketing and Christianity are mutually exclusive, but when marketing becomes our dominant weapon, something’s wrong.

And a final worldly weapon I will mention is charismatic leaders. With the advent of television and instantaneous communication and travel, the power of personality has become exponentially greater. There’s nothing wrong with having a charismatic personality (don’t we all wish we had one?), but when charisma becomes a substitute for substance and content, that’s a problem. And frankly, we see a great deal of this in the church today.

When I look across the Christian landscape today, I am personally troubled by many of the weapons I see being used by Christian organizations, churches, and church leaders. I am not questioning their motivation (I think most of these people are very sincere in their hearts and want to stand up for God and country), but I am questioning their wisdom. I am afraid too often they employ the weapons of the world in the spiritual battle and thus the cause of Christ can actually be hindered.

Paul says here in verse 4, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” Well, then what weapons should we be using? Once again he doesn’t delineate those but assumes his readers know what he’s talking about. And if we think biblically it shouldn’t be too difficult to figure out what those weapons are:

God has given us a different set of weapons for the spiritual battle. (3, 4)

Truth (the Word of God). I believe the Bible is our primary weapon in the spiritual battle. In the best-known passage on spiritual warfare, Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul mentions only one offensive weapon: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). Until 40 years ago there was a consensus among virtually all evangelicals that God speaks principally through His Word, but in many evangelical churches today Bibles are conspicuous by their absence. Our spiritual forefathers produced a tough-minded, rational, disciplined piety. Christians could really think because they allowed their intellectual powers and thought-processes to be under the lordship of Christ. But sadly in many churches today communication (I can’t in good conscience call it “preaching”) is increasingly dominated by images and stories and the kinds of techniques that sell soap and elect Presidents. I feel that if this trend continues, the future of evangelicalism is at stake.

Love. Perhaps you haven’t thought of love as a weapon, but in the spiritual battle it is. The Scripture urges us to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). We will never win the battle for the minds and hearts of people on the issues of homosexuality or abortion, for example, until we learn to treat the opposition with respect, as individuals created in the image of God, with feelings like ourselves. That’s hard, because sometimes we hate what they do. Nevertheless we must learn to hate the sin while loving the sinner. If that sounds trite, it’s not. Everyone of us does that for one person automatically—ourselves.

Faith. Faith is the recognition that God is in control of history, He is the Supreme Commander, and He is working out all things after His own will. In Hebrews 11 we have the account of ordinary men and women who found, *by faith*, that they could stop the mouths of lions, open the doors of prisons, and change the course of human history. Most of us haven’t even begun to see what the weapon on faith can accomplish.

Prayer. In Ephesians 6 another weapon is mentioned, right after the sword of the Spirit: **“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”** Before we teach truth, as we teach it, and after it is over, we must pray that God would use, not flashy personalities and clever expressions, but words that He clothes with His own power, words that will worm their way in through the defenses of the mind and bring the rebel to his knees.

Now why is it important to employ these weapons rather than the weapons the world uses? Because they work.

God’s weapons accomplish more than the world’s weapons ever could. (4b-6)

Look again at verse 4-6:

“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, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

They have divine power to demolish strongholds. What are strongholds? The picture being painted here is that of an impregnable fortress with high walls, moats, draw bridges, ramparts. Masada might come to a Jewish mind; the Acropolis in Athens to a Greek mind. Again, I do not think that when Paul mentions “strongholds” that he is speaking primarily of demon possession. Far more souls have been lost through Satan’s manipulation of the intellectual and ideological fashions of the age than through his recruitment of a handful of witches, or luring people into the occult. The strongholds Paul sets out to besiege are more likely “value systems, world-views, habitual patterns of thought, proud castles of the mind with the banner of self floating from the ramparts.”ⁱⁱ It is the mind that is the seat of rebellion against God. That is where he asserts the desire for autonomy, but Paul saw the Gospel as a powerful way to infiltrate the citadel of the human mind and heart.

Addictions can also be strongholds. I was talking to someone the other day with first-hand knowledge of the meth problem here in Kansas. He said that 90% of the people who try it are addicted to meth after their first hit. They’re hooked; their life is ruined after one hit, barring major intervention or perhaps a miracle! The success rate of treatment facilities for all kinds of addictions is minimal, but when treatment is combined with the godly weapons of truth, love, faith, and prayer, the success rate goes way up.

They can demolish arguments and every pretension. When Paul speaks of “arguments” here, he is probably thinking about the rationalizations that people use to defend their false views. And his mention of “pretensions” speaks of the proud obstacles they raise to the knowledge of God. You don’t have to read much literature from the abortion lobby or the gay agenda or the evolution cartel to understand how twisted and deceptive many of these arguments are. They defend themselves with the language of choice and love and freedom, and they attack with the language of coercion and bigotry and pre-scientific superstition. If you try to debate with them using their presuppositions and their language, you will get nowhere. But the godly weapons of truth, love, faith and prayer can demolish those arguments.

Dr. Don Carson, whom most of you know as a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote a book last year entitled, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*. In it he tells the story of a recently retired Harvard professor who came to faith in Christ through the ministry of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, which is the church Don Hill’s son attends. He heard and responded to the truth of the Gospel, but then Carson adds:

Musing on his conversion some months later, the professor said that a year previously he could not have imagined becoming a Christian, and still less belonging to a staunchly evangelical church. But what drew him, he said, was that these Christians knew him more thoroughly and transparently than his lifelong friends and colleagues. These Christians knew his name, of course, and his likes and dislikes and went out of their way to get to know him, but more importantly, they knew him deeply—they genuinely understood what made him tick, what made him a human being, what moved him, and

what he cherished.

Truth and love again.

There is a third accomplishment that the use of godly weapons allows:

They allow us to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. I think this refers to the fantasies we indulge in, our day-dreams of power and accomplishment, lust for sexual pleasure, envy for the things others have. We will never win the battle against sin as long as we allow ourselves to drain our emotional energies into a secret thought life. We must bring these things captive to Christ and no longer permit them to engage our minds and hearts in. Paul is recognizing here that people will never change their behavior patterns until they change the way they think.

I preached a message several years on GIGO: Garbage in, garbage out. Did you know that this concept actually predates the computer age by at least 3,000 years? Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” The Apostle Paul agrees in Phil. 4:8,9: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Now Paul has one more point for us to contemplate in regard to this spiritual battle:

The greatest mistake we can make in this spiritual battle is to look only on the surface of things. (7)

Paul indicts the Corinthian church with a very serious charge in verse 7: “You are looking only on the surface of things.” Friends, if there is one statement that describes how most of us live, it is found in this verse. We are physical beings in a physical world, and we tend to evaluate everything on that basis, even spiritual things. If a church is growing, we make the assumption that it is healthy. If a Christian leader is selling lots of books, we assume he’s an expert. If there is a conflict, we assume counseling will resolve it. We are always looking only on the surface of things. But this chapter has made it clear that there is a spiritual battle that is much deeper.

Paul points to two specific areas where his friends in Corinth were making a mistake by looking only on the surface.

Relationship. Verse 7b: “If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.” Here’s what I think is going on here: Paul’s opponents were suggesting that they had a unique relationship with Christ that Paul didn’t have. They claimed to be spiritual heavyweights while they alleged that Paul was a poor substitute for the real thing. The truth was probably the exact opposite, but Paul resists pejorative remarks; rather he simply says to his former parishioners that he belonged to Christ as much as anyone. On the surface, it may have appeared otherwise, for Paul didn’t have all the credentials

they boasted of. He doesn't even deny their allegations in verse 10 that "in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." But if they would look under the surface they would see a man who is in a deep and abiding relationship with Christ, a relationship that colored all that he was and did.

Authority. (8) The second area were the Corinthians were making a mistake by looking only on the surface is in regard to authority. And Paul addresses that in verse 8: "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." Paul was also accused of appointing himself as an apostle when he really wasn't one, while his detractors claimed to be "super-apostles" (see 11:5). On the surface his claims might seem suspect, for he was once a persecutor of the Christians, and he wasn't even a Christian until sometime after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is possible that some of these false apostles had come from Jerusalem and even claimed to have known Christ during his earthly ministry. But again, if the church would take the time to look at the facts in depth, they would discover that Paul was given his apostleship by God himself, and therefore the claims of the false teachers are without merit.

Conclusion: I can't help but think of individuals in this church who are struggling with strongholds in their lives. Friends, surface religion just won't cut it with these things. I think about those who are weighed down under the exhaustion of chronic emotional illness, those who are demoralized by lengthy unemployment, those who suffer from a self-image of worthlessness, even to the point of considering self-destruction. I think of those who live a life of sexual fantasy that harms marriage and family, those who have addictive patterns of drug and alcohol abuse, and those who are in bondage to gambling. Whatever your stronghold is, I surface religion cannot demolish it; in fact, it probably cannot even put a dent in it. But the right weapons, the weapons of truth, love, faith, and prayer can.

God is calling His people in this passage to be tough-minded, disciplined, competent soldiers in the spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of people (and their own minds, for that matter). That battle is becoming white hot, friends. We dare not go AWOL. We dare not claim conscientious objection. We dare not even join the reserves to avoid active duty. Instead we need to seize every opportunity to train our hearts and minds, and we need to use the weapons God has provided.

i. *The Economist*, page 35, December 16, 2000.

ii. J. Philip Arthur, *Strength in Weakness*, 183.