

## 12 - THOUGHTS AND TRUTH

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

– 2 Corinthians 10:2-6

The twin phrases “We walk in the flesh” and “We live in this world” both mean that believers are living their natural lives, as all people do, within the confines of history. We are in the world, experiencing both the limitations and advantages of being mortal humans. We are limited in that we grow old and die, but we also get to enjoy the blessings of enjoying life and impacting history.

In this world, we are responsible for all things pertaining to this life and are subject to the laws and limitations of nature. We, as everyone else, are expected to meet obligations, accept responsibility, and participate in the institutions of this age such as marriage, family, government, and national citizenship.

While it is true that believers are not to live their lives based on the fallen standards of this world, that does not change the fact that we still live the entirety of our lives in this world.

The difference between the believer’s experience and the unbeliever’s occurs in the soul - what we know, what we think, what we believe,

**The difference between the believer's experience and the unbeliever's occurs in the soul.** and what we accept as reality and truth. The difference is that even though the believer is in the world, they are not of this world.

One example of this difference is that while we live in this world, we do not teach or convince others about truth and reality like the world does. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:4 that "we are not waging war according to the flesh" - meaning, "we do not wage war as the world does". The word "war" (which is *strateuometha* in the Greek and comes from *strateuo*) means "to be a soldier" or "to serve as a soldier". This word often includes the connotation of serving as a soldier at one's own expense.

In the context of 1 Corinthians 10 Paul is referring to his own ministry, activities, and the various struggles related to his calling as an apostle and his efforts to advance the understanding of the Gospel among the Gentiles. But when we apply this same concept to ourselves, we receive guidance for how we approach all areas of our lives - personal, family, work, social and church.

The phrase translated "weapons of our warfare" ("weapons we fight with") is formed as follows:

The word "warfare" is *strateias* in the Greek and means "warfare", "military expedition," and "military campaign".

The word "weapons" is *opla*, meaning "weapon" or "instrument of warfare". This is a very general word for both offensive and defensive weapons. However, the list of spiritual weapons in Ephesians 6:13-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8 provide more specific details about these weapons, so show more clearly how this word is used here by Paul:

*Take up the **whole armor of God**, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the **breastplate of righteousness**, and, as **shoes for your feet**, having put on the readiness given by the **gospel of peace**. In all circumstances take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the **helmet of salvation**, and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**, praying at all times in the Spirit, with **all prayer and supplication**.*

- Ephesians 6:13-18

*Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the **breastplate of faith and love**, and for a **helmet the hope of salvation**.*

- 1 Thessalonians 5:8

In contrast, "weapons of the world" and "weapons of the flesh (*sarkika*)" are the weapons the common man uses to inflict their ideologies and philosophies on others. Besides instruction and proclamation, these weapons include coercion, deception, manipulation, use of physical force, etc. to build strongholds in the mind that support false ideologies and empty philosophies.

The greater weapons of the Spirit are available to the believer for private and public use. The believers' weapons have divine power since they are rooted in God's divine nature, and they allow truth and reality to be revealed to all mankind. Remember, the absolute reality we profess to the world has already been revealed to all mankind in Creation. We simply need to re-identify it and testify to it. The special revelation of truth recorded in Scripture should be presented by believers to the world, but it also must be illuminated by the Spirit of God to be fully understood.

Our weapons, therefore, are the clear presentation of the facts of God's created reality and the proclamation of God's written revelation, the Bible. The believer's strategy must be threefold:

First, the believer must understand, believe and concentrate on the truth in their own souls.

Second, the believer must proclaim the truth in words for others to hear. This will encourage other believers to do the same, and has the potential of setting free those taken captive by the world's philosophies and Satan's strategies.

Third, the believer must live a righteous life before both God and man. This lifestyle must be in agreement with both God's revealed reality and his truth.

The believer who will succeed in this warfare must have all three facets of God's weapon - their thinking, their words, and their actions - aligned with reality and truth.

When Paul writes that our weapons have "divine power", the Greek text literally says they are "powerful to God".

- They are "powerful" - *dynata* in the Greek, meaning "strong", "mighty", and "powerful".
- And they are "of God" - *theo* is translated "of God", indicating that these weapons are employed on God's behalf and have God's personal interest involved.

These weapons of ours "demolish strongholds". The word "demolish" is from the Greek *kathairesin* meaning "overthrow", "tear down", "pull down" and "destroy". And what they destroy are "strongholds". "The word "strongholds" comes from the Greek word *oxuromaton* meaning "stronghold" or "fortress". In papyri documents from the time the New Testament was being written, the word is seen to

have been used to denote a prison.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (that is, the Old Testament) that Paul was familiar with - and often quoted when among Greek-speaking Gentiles - uses the same word for "stronghold" both in 2 Corinthians and in Proverbs 21:22 when it says:

*A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold (oxuroma) in which they trust.*

- Proverbs 21:22

It is obvious that Paul knew this verse and envisioned the "wise man" defeating the stronghold of the "mighty" with wisdom and thought, instead of physical violence or military strength. Although Paul uses an intense collection of six military terms in these four verses - "waging war" (10:3), "weapons", "warfare", "destroy strongholds" (10:4), "taking captives" (10:5) and "punish disobedience" (i.e., court-martial; 10:6) - the context places the battle in the arena of thought instead of physical military force.

This becomes very clear when we realize that the six military images are described as battling for six facets of the soul - arguments, opinions, knowledge, thoughts, and "not the flesh (world)" but "divine power".

In the proverb quoted above, the wise man - who is, by the way, specifically singular in the Hebrew - scales the entire fortress of false realities defended by self-confident mighty warriors (plural in the Hebrew, *gibbor* meaning "mighty men" or "warriors").

The one overcomes the many with spiritual virtue, as opposed to his opponents' spiritual vice - such as systematic deceit, public censure, social oppression, and lawlessness. By wielding spiritual weapons, he is able to conquer their seemingly undefeatable stronghold.

The phrase translated “demolish arguments and every pretension” is formed as follows:

- The word “demolish” is translated from *kathairountes* which means “to tear down, to destroy”.
- The word “arguments” is from the Greek word *logismous* which means “calculation”, “reasoning”, “reflection”, “thought”.
- The word “pretension” or “high thing” comes from the Greek word *upsoma*, which describes the attitude of men who have crafted ideas they consider to be superior to God’s reality. This crafty human ideology becomes lofty high-mindedness that leaves no room for the knowledge of God. In fact, the very mention of God Almighty is so far beneath their lofty high-mindedness that they find God disgusting. They consider it appalling to allow the Lord to be mentioned alongside their own achievements, ideologies, and plans. Recognition of “the knowledge of God” offends them. The terms “god” or “lord” are only used by them if the image of God has been twisted and perverted into their own image and agrees with their own agenda. In this case their “jesus” or “god” has become an idol supporting a false philosophy.
- This “pretension” or “high thing” is further identified by Paul as “rising up”. This phrase comes from the Greek word *epairomenon* which means “that which is lifted high and exalted”. This means that men have crafted something they put above the knowledge of God, and continually raise it up in a more lofty, pronounced, and dominant position where they expect it to replace all of God’s created reality and revealed truth.

Taking into consideration the deeper meanings of the Greek words, the image created by this phrase – “demolish arguments and every pretension” – is that of walls and towers standing defiantly against God’s reality and revealed truth. These walls and towers are made of deceptive words, false realities, and empty philosophies, and have been built by the world’s systems.

To fight these evil strongholds, the Lord will imbue the armor and weapons of the believer’s warfare with his power. The Lord and Creator of all will have the victory, and he will take captive every thought that comes against the knowledge of God.

And even if he chooses to not do so now in history, we are promised it will happen for certain when Jesus returns:

*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

- Philippians 2:10-11

Paul here tells us that “every thought” will be taken captive after the divinely-powered weapons of thought, word, and righteous lifestyle destroy every argument and every opinion that has raised itself above the knowledge of God and fueled every thought against Christ.

The word “thought” is the Greek word *noema* and means “design”, “purpose”, “scheme”, “mind” or “thought”. These “thoughts” refer to man’s supposed wisdom without God and Satan’s strategies against God. They are the cleverness of man that convince other men they do not need the Lord in life or death. They are worthless. They contain no knowledge of God. And they are the seed of all false philosophies - which are the idols to which men bow down today.

**Jesus and the apostles saw themselves in a war for the thought and understanding in the souls of men.**

This fact is evident in 2 Corinthians, where the same Greek word *noema* is used by Paul again (and noted below in bold type):

*That we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his **designs**.*

- 2 Corinthians 2:11

*Their **minds** were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.*

- 2 Corinthians 3:14

*In their case the god of this world has blinded the **minds** of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

- 2 Corinthians 4:4

*I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your **thoughts** will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

- 2 Corinthians 11:3

Although clearly very powerful, all of these ungodly “thoughts”, “minds”, and “designs” will be destroyed by the divinely-empowered thoughts, words, and actions of godly believers.

Both Jesus and Paul did more than quote passages from the Scripture when they taught or debated. They also used logic, natural evidence, reasoning, and sound arguments to prove their positions and tear down their opponent’s faulty beliefs. Jesus and the apostles saw themselves as being in a war for the thoughts and understandings in the souls of men.

On this note, here is one final thought on the verses at the head of this chapter: The phrase “take captive” is the translation of the Greek word *aichmalotizontes*, which means “to take captive with a spear”, “to bring into captivity”, or “to bring into subjection”. The present tense of this Greek word in 2 Corinthians 10 indicates a *continual* struggle and ongoing warfare.

However, as Paul says, with God’s weapons (the understanding, profession, and living out of truth and reality) we will “take every thought captive to obey Christ”. We will take captivity itself captive, and tear down those fortresses of deceit. And those who have been imprisoned by Satan’s schemes and the lofty, high-minded reasoning of mankind will be set free in Christ. Because “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”