

Winning The Spiritual War

Introduction. Operation Overlord was the code name for the Battle of Normandy, the Allied invasion that launched the successful invasion of German-occupied Western Europe during World War II. Nearly 160,000 Allied troops crossed the English Channel. Plans had been made for months to ensure success and the ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany in Europe. We would all agree that this was a battle the world could not afford to lose.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-6, Paul began a section in this epistle where he fought against self-styled false apostles who had invaded the Corinthian church, vigorously assaulting his ministry, apostolic credentials, and character. This amounted to spiritual warfare, and it signals to all disciples that they will, in fact, fight a spiritual war (cp. 2 Timothy 2:3-4) — a war that can not afford to be lost.

But what are the characteristics of saints who can fight and win the spiritual war? Paul gives four of them: compassionate, courageous, competent, and calculating.

I. The Christian Is Compassionate (v. 1)

- A. Good soldiers take no pleasure in using deadly force and do so only with great reluctance. Surveying the carnage at the Battle of Fredricksburg, General Robert E. Lee said, “It is well that war is so terrible, lest we should grow too fond of it.”
- B. But Paul could preach and teach with authority from Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1). His words manifested divine authority, and so would his power, if he visited Corinth again (2 Corinthians 13:1-3).
- C. Instead of seeking personal vengeance on his enemies, Paul showed them the same patience that the Lord Jesus Christ had shown him (1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 2:19-23). This is power under control. It is patient endurance of offenses.
- D. Paul’s enemies made him out to be a cringing weakling. But he was like the Lord, who came in humble meekness (Matthew 11:29).
- E. Paul’s life and words welded strength and weakness, proving that one can be a bold warrior for the truth, while at the same time compassionate.

II. The Christian Is Courageous (v. 2)

- A. When all attempts at compassion were exhausted, Paul would fight fiercely for the sake of the truth. The biblical record of his courageous life speaks for itself (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Paul fearlessly proclaimed the gospel before the Sanhedrin, Roman governors, King Herod, and even a Roman emperor. He also confronted those who publicly taught false doctrine. He did not even shrink from publicly rebuking Peter when it was necessary.
- B. The apostle begged them not to force him to use the confrontative courage of which he was capable. “Confidence” is being daring of acting without fear regardless of the threats or consequences. He would not back away from a fight with those who threaten the church (1 Corinthians 4:19; 2 Corinthians 13:10).
- C. The false teachers accused Paul of being controlled by the lustful pursuit of money and illicit desires over the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:12). He had

always handled the word of God accurately (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2; 7:2). If they did not repent it would mean war — a war Paul was fully equipped to win.

III. *The Christian Is Competent (vv. 3-5)*

- A. The battlefields of history are strewn with the wreckage of courageous, but ill-equipped, soldiers. The Christian soldier must also be properly armed for the struggle (2 Corinthians 6:7).
- B. Paul did not walk in the flesh. He denied the false charge that he was corrupt, but acknowledged the reality of his humanity. He bore the authority of Jesus Christ in a frail human body (2 Corinthians 4:16; 5:1).
- C. Every soldier of Christ is in a spiritual war against darkness (Ephesians 6:12). There are no exemptions or deferments. We fight for the truth of scripture, the honor and glory of the Lord, the salvation of sinners, and the virtue of the saints.
- D. A spiritual war cannot be successfully fought with fleshly weapons. Human reason, wisdom, plans, strategies, organizations, skill, eloquence, marketing, religious showmanship, philosophical or psychological speculation, ritualism, or mysticism are all ineffective weapons against the forces of the kingdom of darkness. They cannot rescue sinners from the domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13) or transform believers into Christ's likeness (Romans 8:29).
- E. Additionally, fleshly weapons cannot successfully assault the formidable strongholds in which sinners have entrenched themselves. This is a battle for the minds of people who are captive to lies that are exalted in opposition to scripture (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:4-6; cp. 1 Corinthians 3:20). There are multiple strongholds which must be defeated by the gospel of Christ:
 - 1. Atheism is the philosophy that there is no God.
 - 2. Relativism is a popular view which states that absolute truth does not exist.
 - 3. Modernism, also known as theological liberalism, rejects the concept of authority in religion and states that religious beliefs must pass the test of reason and experience.
 - 4. Postmodernism accepts all religions as true, provided that no one of them claims to be exclusively true.
 - 5. Hedonism is a philosophy which holds that man's highest goal is pleasure.
 - 6. Universalism denies the reality of eternal punishment and postulates the eventual salvation of all.
 - 7. Materialism is an obsessive preoccupation with worldly possessions.
 - 8. Naturalism is the belief that everything in the universe is explained by naturalistic processes.
- F. Using God's truth (Ephesians 6:17), saints smash enemy fortresses, march the prisoners out, and bring them into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 23). And just as soldiers train constantly in the use of their weapons, so also must Christian soldiers constantly study the scriptures (Joshua 1:8; Acts 17:11).

IV. *The Christian Is Calculating (v. 6)*

- A. The competent soldier understands the crucial importance of timing. Rather than firing blindly and risk killing friendly troops, he waits until the enemy is clearly in sight. "Readiness" was a term used of military preparedness.

- B. This disobedience was one which tampered with the truth of the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4), and because of that its perpetrators could be called false apostles, deceitful workmen, and even servants of Satan.
- C. Paul would not unleash his formidable apostolic power on anyone until each had taken his stand. That way, it would be clear who accepted the truth and who rejected it (1 Corinthians 11:19). Paul would be compassionate to the former, but to the latter he would be a competent and courageous opponent.
- D. Paul must secure a firm base in the Corinthian church before he will risk a face-to-face confrontation with those who still oppose him. Unless a church as a whole is willing to support spiritual discipline, that discipline will remain largely ineffective (1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Timothy 1:18-20).

Conclusion. It is not a question whether Christians will fight the spiritual war for the truth against lies; the battle is unavoidable. But those who are successful in the conflict will imitate Paul's compassion, courage, competence, and caution.

In an age of social media memes, it is easy to think that being a Christian is a soft exercise in facing disappointment and discouragement. Let's not forget that we are in a war, and that means fighting "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12).