

SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND THE
BATTLE FOR THE MIND

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2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6

- “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 are divinely powerful to 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.”

WHAT IS A FORTRESS?

- The Greek word οχυρομα means
 - A castle, a stronghold: anything on which one relies; to fortify, holding safely,
 - Arguments and reasonings by which a disputant endeavors to fortify his opinion and defend it against his opponent
- Sounds good but...
 - It is a stronghold constructed in your mind by an enemy!
- Paul says we are destroying these fortresses with spiritual weapons
 - What are they?

SPECULATIONS

- Paul explains: We are destroying speculations
 - Speculations: trying to answer basic questions
 - How did we get here, why are we here, where are we heading...
 - *But without acknowledging the God of the Bible and in active opposition to Him*
 - Greek λογισμος : reasoning, thought, imagination, computation or calculation; a judgement or decision such as the conscience passes
 - A religious example: Hinduism or any of the many other religions
 - A secular example: materialistic evolution
- None take into account the revelation of the living God

LOFTY THINGS

- “... and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”
A packed statement!
- Every πας : Paul says we are destroying all of them! Not one will be ignored.
 - Any, every, the whole, always, ever, as many as, thoroughly, whatsoever and whosoever
- Lofty thing υψωμα: an elevated place or structure; a barrier; a rampart, a bulwark
- Raised up επαυω: literally or figuratively; lift up, raise on high, exalt self
- Against κατά: opposition, distribution or intensity; toward, along
- Knowledge γνωσις: knowing, knowledge, science, intelligence, understanding; general knowledge of the Christian religion; moral wisdom
- *These lofty, raised up things are barriers against knowing God as he is*

TAKING CAPTIVE EVERY THOUGHT

- Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
 - Make captive αιχμαλωτιζω: lead away captive; bring into captivity; captivate; metaphorically to capture ones mind
 - Every πας: again - all of them! God does not ignore any of them. Any, every, the whole, always, ever, as many as, thoroughly, whatsoever and whosoever
 - Thought νοημα: perception; mind, intellect; that which thinks; how the mind interprets internally what is externally perceived;
 - Obedience υπακοη: attentive listening, compliance, submission, obey.
- The idea is that of a stronghold that is breached and those relying on its protection are taken captive. Not only to demolish lies and arguments but to bring our thoughts under the Lordship of Christ

TO SUMMARIZE THUS FAR

- Fortresses are beliefs we hold that distort our understanding of God and prevent us from knowing and obeying him as he is
 - Worldview – our belief system. it is shaped by what we were taught, the events of our lives, how we responded those events. We presume them to be true and rarely question them
- A spectrum of falsehoods: from atheist to a judgmental god who doesn't care about you
 - Everything in between
 - God is great but capricious and unknowable
 - God is everywhere but impersonal
 - God is all powerful but doesn't care about me: he isn't actively involved in my life
 - And many more variations
- These lies effect everything: decisions we make (marriage, work, dreams), what we believe about God, others, ourselves, life
- These distortions of God are as effective at keeping us from knowing and experiencing God as any demonic attack

WHAT COMMON EXAMPLE DID PAUL USE?

- Context is key. These verses do not stand alone
- The context helps us understand how subtle and destructive this warfare of the mind is
- We can be shackled by strongholds until we finally recognize them
- Paul was not writing about power over demons, or healing oppressed people or overcoming Satan's opposition by persecution to carrying out our call
- *He was talking about self image!*
 - *The problem of self-perception*
 - *A common problem almost everyone deals with at one point of another*
- This was the problem Paul used to illustrate spiritual warfare!

WHAT PROBLEM WAS PAUL ADDRESSING?

- Paul was responding to the Corinthians disregard of him
 - Judging Paul with wrong values
 - Outward appearances
 - “You are looking at things as they are outwardly” vs 7
 - “his letters are weighty and strong but...”
 - His personal appearance is unimpressive
 - His speech is contemptible
- They were comparing Paul to the flashy, eloquent “super apostles” that came to Corinth. vs 12:11
- But Paul would have nothing to do with this
 - “We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves” vs 12a

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

- “When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves they are without understanding” 10:12b
- Circling each other, eyeing one another, taking a measuring tape against each other
 - Some come out on top – feel good about themselves, become arrogant, proud
 - Many come out on bottom in their own eyes – feel depressed, even suicidal. This is not humility. It is thwarted pride
- It is the wrong scale! Whether on top or on the bottom is irrelevant because it’s based on falsehood
 - Throw out the scale and the conclusions based on it!

NO UNDERSTANDING

- They are without understanding
- Too strong a statement. Maybe just a little off?
 - Just need a little teaching to correct things?
 - Send Timothy or Epaphras to instruct them?
- No understanding: “When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves they are without understanding”
 - **They don’t know who they are** so they measure themselves against others to calculate their worth
 - **They don’t understand how God sees and evaluates them** – they don’t know his scale
 - **They don’t understand God’s nature and values**
 - **They don’t understand others:** they don’t know how God views them so they judge others with the same wrong standard
 - Pretty comprehensive list! *They are without understanding!*
- These were Christians – they knew God but were way off in their understanding of him

ANOTHER LAYER OF FALSE MEASUREMENT

- Comparing myself against the theoretical self I might have been
 - Failures and sins
 - Missed opportunities
 - We evaluate our own efforts, degree of discipline, time management, creativity, skills, etcetera
- Results in regrets, self reproach, self rejection, anger and doubts, despondency and giving up
- ***We can no more accurately judge ourselves that we can others***

Paul: “But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; ***in fact, I do not even examine myself.*** For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” 1 Corinthians 4:3-5

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING OUR IDENTITY

- The identity of Jesus was questioned both at the beginning and end of his ministry
- The beginning of Jesus' ministry being tempted in the wilderness
 - If you are the Son of God... Mt.4:3,6; Luke 4:3,9
 - Maybe you are, maybe you aren't – prove it
 - Since you are, show it (by abusing your power and putting God to the test)
 - His trust was in God for his identity. "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Mt. 3:17; Luke 3:22
- At the end of Jesus' ministry on trial before the High Priests
 - "Are you the Son of God?" "Yes, I am." Mt. 26:63,64; Luke 22:70.71.
 - He was willing to die rather than deny who he was
- Who are you?
 - "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26
 - "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Romans 8:14

AN ACT OF FAITH

- It is humbling to give up our self image and accept the image God has of us
- It is an act of faith: I give up control of my worth and entrust myself to God and his evaluation of me
 - Giving up and laying at the feet of Jesus the image I have of myself and accepting the image he has of me is difficult to do. Why?
 - Fear that He will not value me; that I truly am not worth much; that he will forever think of me as second rate and just put up with me being in his heaven
 - Fear that he has favorites and that I am not one of them
 - ***Fear he will judge me the same way I judge myself.*** We are not merciful judges but God is
 - Accepting his evaluation of me is telling God I trust his love for me
 - **Tell God you believe he loves and delights in you *just as he does in others*** Prov. 3:12
- Not understanding or believing God's view of you can be devastating on so many levels

GOD'S WAY IS SO MUCH BETTER

- Many of you try to be very honest in your assessment of yourselves
 - You can name a dozen people, maybe hundreds, who are better than you in something
 - More artistic, more athletic, more disciplined, more accomplished, more fruitful
 - As you compare your life with others you feel more and more depressed, defeated and worthless
- God doesn't measure you that way: It is not an interpersonal competition
- How does he judge you?
 - First as his beloved child! He made each of us with the same care, thought and love
 - Does God have a favorites? Yes! Each of you is his favorite.
 - My boss, who has six kids, likes to answer the question of does he have a favorite child with, "Yes, Johnny is my favorite, Susan is my favorite, Steve is my favorite, they are all my favorite!" A good parent loves all his children equally in spite of their differences
 - He made each of us in his own image. He does not have a favorite. We are all his favorite

GOD'S WAY IS SO MUCH BETTER

- Second: we are each given a sphere of influence in which to work and minister
 - “We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you.” 2 Cor. 10:13 NIV
 - It is within that sphere God will judge our fruitfulness and faithfulness to his call
 - God sets the boundaries of that sphere of influence, we don't
 - He gives us a job to do and wants us to do it well
 - He doesn't want us to do the job he gave to someone else 2 Cor. 10:16,16
 - God wants us to focus and work on what he has given us to do
 - “We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he created beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10
 - God will assess how well, wholeheartedly, faithfully we carried out the task he gave us to do
- There are other factors as well but none are in comparison with others

WHAT OTHER FORTRESSES

- Self image is only one fortress that the world, the flesh and the devil have set up in our minds
- What other fortresses exist in your world view, your belief system that hold you captive?
 - What speculations do you have about life that are not consistent with God's view?
 - What lofty arguments prevent some aspect of the truth of God from penetrating your mind and shaping your understanding of God?
 - What incorrect beliefs concerning God: maybe you think he is harsh (he will punish me not forgive me), he doesn't provide (I have to), he won't be there in the unknown future (I have to worry and plan for it), others. 1 John 1:9; Matthew 6:27-34. John 8:31,32: the truth will set you free
- So don't be conformed to this world any longer but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ Rom. 12:2; 2Cor. 10:5