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Winning the Spiritual War

10: 1-6

DIG: What is the basic argument or conflict taking place in Corinth? Paul asserts that beneath the surface, the enemy (the Adversary) has a foothold in the church at Corinth. What does this mean? How could such a thing happen? Critics had evidently claimed that Paul was bold in his writings but meek and uncertain when he was with the Corinthians in person. How did Paul refute that charge? How does Paul advocate dealing with wrong thinking and wrong behavior in the Church? Paul was not eager to confront those Corinthians who continued to oppose his God-given authority, but he was willing to do whatever was necessary to preserve the church. Why is this kind of bold leadership important even today?

REFLECT: How should you be warned by this incident, in which believable suggestions were being made by seemingly spiritual people using lots of religious language? How would it change your life if you consistently developed this discipline of arresting and examining every thought? What can you learn here in this passage about the character and resolve of the enemy? Why were Paul's ideas about how and what to think more valid than the ideas of the false apostles in Corinth? What concrete steps can you take to submit every thought to the authority of Messiah (see Acts 17:10-12)? Can you think of a time when wrong thinking resulted in wrong choices in your life? How about when right thinking led to wise choices?

There is a war taking place, and the primary battleground is in our minds.

As the word **now (10:1)** indicates, this passage begins a new section of **Paul's** letter (**to see link click [Br](#) - Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority**). Even though **he** had acknowledged the repentance in the church at **Corinth** (see **[BI](#) - The Effects of the Severe Letter**), **the apostle** was wise enough to know that **his rivals** (see **[Af](#) - The Problem of the False Apostles**) were still a force to be reckoned with. The general repentance of the congregation had likely only driven **their** poisonous revolt underground. There, some bided **their** time, hoping to rekindle the rebellion against **Paul**. In the meantime, **they** surely conducted more subtle warfare against **him**. To stamp out the last

traces of rebellion, **Paul** launched a search-and-destroy mission to root out the remaining pockets of resistance at **Corinth**. **His** attack was two pronged. The preliminary bombardment, as it were, came in the last four chapters of this letter; the final assault would come when **the apostle** visited **Corinth** a couple of months later (**12:14** and **13:1**). This last section of **Paul's** letter, then, was addressed to the disobedient minority; namely, **the false apostles** and **their** remaining deluded followers. As the battle continued against the forces of evil at **Corinth**, **Paul** appeared in **his** soldier's uniform to set an example for all to follow. **He** reveals four traits of a soldier who can triumph in the spiritual **war**.

He is compassionate, courageous, competent and calculating.

He is compassionate (10:1): Before beginning **his** assault of **the false apostles** and **their** followers, **the apostle** expressed **his** unwillingness to engage in combat. Good soldiers take no pleasure in using deadly force and do so only with great reluctance. A noble warrior's power is constrained by his compassion and exercised only when there is no other option. This is the spirit in which **Paul** fought **his** spiritual **war**. That did not mean, of course, that **Paul** doubted the authority delegated to **him** by **Yeshua Messiah**. In fact, **he** boldly asserted: **Now it is I myself, Paul, making an appeal to you**. Unlike **the false apostles**, **Paul** did not depend on any human source for **his** authority (**3:1**). **His** words revealed divine authority, and so would **his** power, if necessary, when **he** visited **Corinth** (see **Cg - A Fond Farwell**). Instead of seeking personal vengeance on **his enemies**, **Paul** showed **them** the same **patience** that **the Lord** had shown **him** (**First Timothy 1:16**).

But before wielding **his** apostolic might, **Paul** first displayed **his** compassion. **He appealed to the rebellious minority with the meekness** (Greek: *prautes*, meaning *a humble and gentle attitude that results in patient endurance of offenses*) **and gentleness** (Greek: *epieikeia*, is translated *kindness* in its only other appearance) **that can only come from Messiah**, to end **their** attack on **him** and be reconciled to the truth. However, **Paul's** enemies put a negative spin on **his** compassion, scornfully condemning it as cowardly weakness. **They** accused **him** of being **timid when face-to-face with them but intimidating from a distance** (see **10:10**).²⁰⁵

How ignorant **the Corinthians** were, even after all that **Paul** had taught **them**. **They** failed to realize that the true spiritual power is **meekness and gentleness**, not in "throwing **his** spiritual weight around." **Paul's** very attitude in these opening verses disarmed **his** opponents. In fact, the use of **his** own name is significant, for **Paul** means *little*. If **he** was a spiritual weakling, then so was **Messiah**, for **Yeshua** demonstrated **meekness and gentleness** when **He** said: **Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am**

gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29).²⁰⁶

He is courageous (10:2): Those who mistook **Paul** for a weakling were drastically mistaken. When all attempts at compassion were exhausted, **he** would not shrink from using **his** authority as **Messiah's apostle**. It would not be good for those enemies when **Paul** comes and gives them a dose of **his** courage **face-to-face**, the courage of which **they** were mocking. **He** certainly intended to demolish **them** completely. **He** literally **begged the Corinthians** not to become involved with **the rebels**, not to listen to **them** or associate with **them** so that, when **he** comes and makes short work of **his enemies**, **he** will not have to also deal with any of **them**.²⁰⁷

If necessary, **Paul** was going to deal directly with **those** who were slandering **him**, saying: **I beg you not to force me to be intimidating when I am with you**, and a new element enters the tone of **his** letter. From here on, **he** makes use of irony, even sarcasm, as **he** ridicules **his opponents**, especially **the false apostles (11:5 and 12:11)**, and **he** indicates with increasing sharpness that **he** will not spare those who continue to **sin**. **He** has shown how gentle **he** can be; but now **he** shows another side of **himself**, as **he** does **his** utmost to turn **the divisive troublemakers** into faithful followers of **Messiah** and **His** appointed **apostle (1:1)**.²⁰⁸

Paul would wage his war toward some who regard us as living in a worldly way. The false apostles and their duped followers slandered **Paul** by accusing **him** of walking according **his old sin nature** (see the commentary on **Romans Cd - The Reason for the Inner Conflict**). According to **them**, **he** was motivated by evil self-interest, the lustful pursuit of money, and illicit desires. This was the height of projection.

Throughout **his** letter, **Paul** courageously defended **himself** against those outrageous charges, which were at the heart of the conspiracy against **him**. In **1:12** **he** wrote: **For we take pride in this: that our conscience assures us that in our dealings with the world, and especially with you, we have conducted ourselves with frankness and godly pureness of motive - not by worldly wisdom but by God-given grace.** Unlike **the false apostles**, **Paul** handled **the Word** accurately: **For we are not like a lot of folks who go around huckstering God's message for a fee; on the contrary, we speak out of a sincere heart, as people sent by God, standing in His presence, living in union with the Messiah (3:17).** Nor did **he** have a secret life of **sin**, having **renounced the hidden things because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending [myself] to every man's conscience in the sight of God (4:2 NASB).** "Make room for us in your hearts," **he**

begged the Corinthians, “we haven’t wronged anyone, we haven’t corrupted anyone, and we haven’t exploited anyone” (7:2). Paul had given the rebels fair warning. If **they** did not repent, it would mean spiritual **war** - the kind of **war** that **the apostle** was fully equipped to win.²⁰⁹

He is competent (10:3-5): In addition to being compassionate and courageous, the believer in **Messiah’s** spiritual army must also be properly armed for the battle. If any of **his adversaries** imagined that **Paul** was not a competent soldier, **they** were in for a rude awakening. **The apostle** gave **his opponents** fair warning that **he** was armed with **the weapons of righteousness (6:7b)**. Here, once more, is an expression of the power-in-weakness paradox of **apostolic** ministry. While acknowledging that **he walks in the flesh** (Greek: *sarx*, meaning *original sin nature*), **Paul** denies that **he wages war according to the flesh (10:3)**. Like all other human beings who **walk in the flesh**, **Paul** is a mere **jar of clay (4:7)**, who was **outwardly wasting away (4:16)**, a **thorn-afflicted man (12:7)**. Yet, even in the midst of such weakness, **he** was an effective bearer of **the Word (2:17, 3:2-3, 4:1-6, 5:11-12, 11:2, 12:19, 13:3-4)**. But because **he** was a fallen human being **in the flesh** it was only by **the Word of God, the treasure itself (4:7)**, along with the aid of **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**, not its frail, ever debilitating, human **bearer**, that was powerful enough to achieve the purposes of **ADONAI**.²¹⁰

And that was exactly where **the false apostles** and **their** followers made **their** mistake. **They** regarded **Paul** as being only a man like **themselves**, and thus thought that in a fight **they** would be more than a match for **the apostle** and **his** little crew. Those **opponents** imagined that **they** could outdistance **Paul** in trickery and underhanded work. To this point, **their** heavy artillery had been lies and slander. **They** were sure **they** would win the battle with that kind of bombardment. However, **He** told **the Corinthians** not to get involved in that fight because **Paul**, the great general and **his** lieutenants, operated with surprisingly different armament.²¹¹



To successfully fight **the spiritual war**, it requires **weapons** from the heavenly arsenal (**10:4a**). Continuing with the siege metaphor, **Paul** declares that **the weapons we use to wage war are not fleshly; on the contrary, they have God's power for the destruction of fortresses**, meaning false biblical teachings and false ideas that oppose the gospel (see the commentary on **First Corinthians An - The Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom**). **Paul** liked to use word pictures drawn from the image of a soldier (**Romans 13:12; First Corinthians 9:7; Philippians 2:25; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; First Timothy 1:18 and 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4 and 4:7; Philemon 2**), and with Roman soldiers ever present in the Mediterranean world, use of such language would have been very effective with **Paul's** audience.²¹² **Paul** suggests a variety of both offensive and defensive weapons (see the commentary on **Ephesians Cb - The Armor of God**).

Get the picture that's in **Paul's** mind with all its crushing irony. **We demolish arguments and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of God (10:4b)**. He paints **his opponents** as a handful of **hostiles** who, by harassing **the Corinthians**, imagine that **they** can defeat **ADONAI Elohei-Tzva'ot, the LORD God of heaven's** angelic **armies**, and whole great campaign of **God** which had been entrusted to **Paul**. **Psalm 2:4** shows how ridiculous that is: **He who sits in heaven laughs; ADONAI looks at them with contempt**. **Paul** wants **his Corinthians** to see all of it in that light; then none of **them** would ever listen to those foolish opponents again. This **war** could not lead to anything but victory.²¹³

Spiritually, your mind is your most vulnerable organ. To reduce temptation, keep your mind occupied with **God's Word** and other **good thoughts**. You defeat bad **thoughts** by **thinking** of something better. This is the principle of replacement. You overcome evil with **good (Romans 12:21)**. The Adversary can't get your attention when your mind is preoccupied with something else. That's why the Bible repeatedly tells us to **keep our thoughts on Yeshua (Hebrews 3:1 NIV), always think about Yeshua (Second Timothy 2:8 GWT), and fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable (Philippians 4:8 TEV)**.

If you're serious about defeating temptation you must manage your mind and monitor your media intake. The wisest man who ever lived warned: **Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts (Proverbs 4:23 TEV)**. Don't allow trash into your mind indiscriminately. Be selective. Choose carefully what you **think** about. Follow **Paul's** model: **We take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah (10:5)**. This takes a lifetime of practice, but with the help of **the Spirit of God** you can reprogram the way you

think.²¹⁴

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great military mind power! Though we have built fortresses around bad thoughts, **You** can destroy those fortresses as we open the gates of our mind to **Your** cleansing. No habit or repeated thought is ever too powerful for **You**. **Your** cleansing of our thoughts is like a load of bricks taken off our backs. What a joy it is to **take every thought captive** as we think on **Your** great mercy and power. It is such a comfort to meditate on the stories in the Bible and your many wonderful characteristics. It brings peace to go to sleep thinking: Praise you **God! You** are Holy, Almighty, All Powerful, All Wise, Forgiving **Savior** and Loving **Father!** Thank you for being such a wonderful Heavenly **Father!** In **Yeshua's** Holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

He is calculating (10:6): The competent soldier understands the crucial importance of timing. Rather than fire blindly and risk killing friendly troops, he waits until the enemy is clearly in sight. **Paul** had the courage and the competence **to punish all disobedience at Corinth. He** would not allow **the false apostles** to destroy the church. But **he** also had the discipline to wait until the church's **obedience** was **complete (10:6 NASB)**. **Paul** would not unleash **his** formidable apostolic power on anyone until each had taken their stand. That way, it would be clear who accepted the truth and who had rejected it. **Paul** would be compassionate to the former, but the latter would find **him** to be a courageous and highly competent opponent.²¹⁵

The universe is not a neutral place. There is **a war** going on, and the primary battleground is in our minds. All day, every day, we are bombarded with words, ideas, images, and suggestions. From advertisements to blogs, from scientists to internet preachers, we face continual exposure to various perspectives and values. Not all of the information to which we are exposed is true. Much of it is unhealthy and opposed to what **ADONAI** says. And since ideas always have consequences, and what we believe ultimately does determine how we will behave, we must take radical action. What can we do? Wake up. Put on **God's armor**. Pray for wisdom. Think critically. Practice discernment. Renew our minds daily.²¹⁶