

# THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

by Ray C. Stedman

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Each of you must have asked yourself at some time, "What can I do about these problems that are so widespread and serious these days?" And, "How helpful can I really expect to be as an individual?"

The Scriptures have an answer to these questions. We might expect that they would, for they are designed to perfect the man of God, that he may be perfect, completely furnished unto every good work {cf, 2 Tim 3:17}. So we should expect that there would be ample guidance given in the Scriptures to enable us to handle the problems and questions which pursue us on every side.

The passage we are to center our thoughts upon these next few weeks is Second Corinthians, Chapter 10, the first six verses. Here is another of those pockets of condensed wisdom which you find frequently throughout the pages of the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament and New alike, and which it is very unwise to hasten through. This kind of a passage must be gone through slowly and thoughtfully, and, therefore, I propose that we take ample time. I want to make these messages as practical and as helpful to as many as possible.

The introduction to this section of Second Corinthians is found in Verses 1 through 4. The Apostle Paul, writing to his friends in Corinth, probably from the city of Ephesus, says.

**I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ -- I who am humble when face to face with you but bold to you when I am away! -- I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of acting in worldly fashion. For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. {2 Cor 10:1-4 RSV}**

In these verses we have brought before us the primary theme of this section. The background of it is a challenge to the authority of the Apostle Paul by the Corinthians. There were some among them who were seeking to undermine the effect of Paul's words, both in his letters and in his preaching to them. That is not surprising for it is still going on today. There are many today who object strenuously to what he teaches. In certain circles we are told that the Apostle Paul actually changed the teachings of the Lord Jesus, and thus changed Christianity from a simple, easily understood message to a highly complicated theological treatise, difficult to understand and completely different in intent and content from that which was preached by Jesus.

Something of that had already started in the early church. When these Corinthians had received letters from Paul, some were angered by them and resisted strongly what he had said. Specifically, as this passage reveals, certain Christians in Corinth were saying that Paul was, essentially, no different than anyone else. His apostleship really gave him no more right to speak with authority than anyone else had, and his motivations were essentially the same as anyone's; i.e., he is out to get what he wants by whatever policy will work. Paul was quoting them when he writes, "I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold to you when I am away."

They were saying this was his procedure, his maneuver, to try to get us to do what he wants. In other words, they were saying, he is simply another religious figure who is playing the old game of "power politics," so we do not need to pay any more attention to him than we would to anyone else who came in and tried to take advantage of us for his own purposes.

This the apostle promptly and powerfully repudiates. He says, in effect,

"This is not the case. You Corinthians are quite wrong. You have failed to recognize the fundamental change which occurs in a Christian. When a man becomes a Christian, something fundamental, something absolutely

radical, occurs in him so that he cannot see things as he once did. Furthermore, you do not understand the radical difference with which an apostle (who is, by virtue of his office, a model Christian, a pattern for others) must face life. If you think that I act like other people, that my motives, purposes, and goals are no different than ordinary men and women, then you have fundamentally misunderstood the whole matter."

"For," he goes on to say in Verses 3 and 4, "though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

In the literal Greek the Apostle Paul does not say quite what is said here. The phrase, *For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war*, is actually, "For though we walk (or live) in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." The revisers here have substituted the word *world*, for *flesh*. Yet this is not exactly wrong. They are recognizing the close affiliation between what the Bible calls "the flesh," and "society" or "the world." These two are closely combined and associated.

What is the flesh? You who have been studying the New Testament for years know that the flesh is essentially inherited selfishness. It is what is basically wrong with human nature. It is the monkey wrench which was inserted into the machinery of humanity at the very beginning and which we all inherit from our ancestors. It is responsible for the fact that all of us began life with a taint, a twist in our mechanism. It is not very long before it is quite apparent that we are fundamentally selfish. You do not have to teach a baby to be selfish. You do not have to send him to a private school to learn how to be naughty, to resist his parents, or to be inherently selfish. This taint crops up in any individual no matter what kind of a background, exposure, or environment he is subjected to; it is in the bloodstream of humanity. This is the unpleasant fact which society constantly resists, which man does not want to face, but which the Word of God bluntly and clearly states.

If that is the flesh, that tendency to evil in every individual, then if you put all these flesh-centered, flesh-governed people together into a society, you have what the Bible calls "the world." It is society governed by the flesh; society, with all the power structures with which we are so familiar in this day, all built upon self-interest. This, any observer of human life can see, pervades the world of our day; self-interest is back of everything.

That is why the revisers have substituted the word "world" here. In a sense, they are right. This is clearly the idea the apostle has in mind. He says, "We are not acting like other people. We do not operate from the same motives; there is something quite different about us. If you try to judge us on the same basis you judge others you are going to be very far off -- you will miss the point entirely."

He is declaring also the fundamental tension in which a Christian lives. He says, "We live in the flesh, in the world of normal society, but we do not fight on those terms. We are not carrying on a worldly war." Perhaps it might be helpful in this connection to review the rendering of certain other versions. J. B. Phillips puts it this way:

**The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. {2 Cor 10:3 J. B. Phillips}**

The New English Bible puts it:

**Weak men we may be; but it is not as such that we fight our battles. {2 Cor 10:3 NEB}**

Perhaps the most helpful is the Living Letters translation, which says,

**It is true that I am an ordinary weak human being, but I don't use human plans and methods to win my battles. {2 Cor 10:3 Living Letters}**

Notice the exquisite balance and sanity of that. The Apostle Paul is speaking not only for himself, but for all Christians. Remember that an apostle is a pattern Christian. He is what all Christians are supposed to be. And he says, first, we live in the world. We don't run away from it. Monastic life has appealed to many through the centuries. History is full of men and women who have retreated to quiet places and tried to shut away all the mundane prattle and care of life. Count Tolstoi, of Russia; Rousseau, of France; Gauguin, the painter -- all

tried to run away from life. There are many who seek to do so yet today. What astonishes me is the number of Christians who have this attitude. There has grown up in our time what I call the "Bible-city syndrome," which attempts to create a Christian hothouse, an atmosphere which is thoroughly Christian from the womb to the tomb, and permits no invasion of secular ideas or forces. It seeks to insulate and isolate as much as possible the Christian from the world.

This is basically unbiblical and sub-Christian because it is contrary to this clear word of the apostle, who says, "We Christians live right in the midst of the world." That is where we are supposed to be. The Lord Jesus himself put it this way: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," {Matt 10:16 KJV}. It must be a crazy shepherd who would do a thing like that! Yet that is how radical is the difference between true Christianity and the false version so evident in many places today. This "Bible-city syndrome" is producing thousands of Christian dropouts today. I understand there is a group in this very area that is suggesting something of this nature in the mountains near here. I do not know the whole story and therefore I am not trying to judge it, but I would certainly be against a Christian isolation ward if that is what they have in view. It is thoroughly unbiblical. "No," says the apostle, "we live in the flesh: we live in the world." That is where we are intended to live. It is well expressed in the old hymn,

Where cross the crowded ways of life.  
Where sound the cries of race and clan.  
Above the noise of selfish strife.  
We hear thy voice,  
O Son of Man.

"Yet," says Paul, "though we live in the world and do not run away from society, still we do not use human plans and methods to win our battles." It is important that we understand that, because here is where all the problems has come. Many have recognized that Christians are to live in the world, but they go on to assume that a Christian living in the world must be like the world, that he must think like the world, that he must depend upon the thoughts, philosophies, ideas, and writers of the world, and draw all his arguments and his solutions to problem from these sources. "No," says Paul, "you are quite wrong there. If you judge me as doing this then you have not understood the Christian position at all. We do not use human plans and methods to win our battles."

Here, in my judgment, is the fundamental error of those who seek to make social concern the primary task of the church today. They are opposing the right enemy but with the wrong weapons. They are seeking to employ the weapons of the world, which Paul renounces; he repudiates them entirely. He says, "we do not war a worldly warfare, we do not use human plans and methods to win our battles."

What are these weapons of the world, these human plans and methods to win battles? Well, you can hardly escape them today. They are on every side, in every newspaper, every magazine you pick up. These are full of approaches to the solution of human problems. They are all perfectly sincere, often characterized by tremendous dedication and zeal and commendable in the extreme; but they are worldly. They are of the flesh; they are limited. These weapons are power politics, action blocs, organized programs, demonstrations, boycotts, picketing; even violence and arson.

Let us face some facts plainly. These are clearly worldly weapons, are they not? They are what would be suggested by any non-Christian who is confronted by these problems and is trying to find a solution, men like Saul Alinsky or Stokely Carmichael. These men openly, clearly, and unequivocally propose these kind of solutions, and you cannot blame them. That is all they can see; that is all they know to do; that is all they have confidence in. They cannot see beyond the material, the visible, the physical situation.

Anyone who reads the New Testament sees that this is always the way of the world. Its solutions are fundamentally shallow and superficial, because they are essentially one-dimensional. I was interested recently to learn that there is a new book out, written by a secular writer, called, *The One-dimensional Man* . It is an attempt (I gathered ) to come to grips with some of the social issues today. But even worldlings can see that their approach lacks something -- it is one-dimensional.

Yet this is not what you have in the New Testament. This is not how a Christian should approach these problems. As the Apostle Paul put it in this very letter, just a few chapters back, "We look not at the things which are seen, but also at the unseen; we look not only to the temporal, but also to the eternal," {cf, 2 Cor 4:18}. There is a new dimension that must come in here. The Christian approach to any basic problem, whether of society or in an individual life, must be different than that of a worldling if he expects to win any battles.

The wonderful thing about the Scriptures is that life is constantly confirming them. Life is a kind of laboratory in which all these scriptural principles are being tested, worked out for us. We can then see for ourselves, if we observe enough of life over a long enough span, which is right and which is wrong -- the worldly solution, or the scriptural solution. History confirms the fact that the world's weapons do not win battles.

On my recent trip around the world I had to spend long hours on a plane, sometimes eight, ten, or eleven hours at a time. I tried to take advantage of this flight time by carrying with me a very weighty volume (in fact, I was on the verge of having to pay overweight charges on it several times!). It was a volume of Will Durant's tremendous study, *The History of Civilization*. I took the volume, "Caesar and Christ," and, though I did not get through it entirely, I only had to read part of it to be aware that the ancient world struggled with exactly the same problems that we struggle with today. There were the same intrigues, the same political maneuvers, the same plots, the same programs, the same solutions to problems. It was remarkable to see that long before Christ people were struggling with exactly the same problems that oppress us today. There are no secular solutions that work; at best they only temporarily rearrange the symptoms of the problem. That is the most we can hope for from worldly approaches.

"No," says Paul, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, they are not fleshly, they are not worldly. But they are mighty! They have divine power, unto the pulling down of strongholds. They work. They win. They destroy strongholds, they overthrow entrenched evil, they strike off shackles, they set men free. That is what they are for. If they do not do that they are worthless, they are no better than any other program. But these work. They may not be evident, but they are effective."

Well, what are these weapons? That is the major issue I want to face with you now.

What are these weapons? If they are not normal human plans, what are they?

If they do not include these approaches that are so common today, then what are they?

I wonder what you are answering in your own minds to that question? How many Christians can answer this question? What are the weapons with which we are to encounter the problems, the battles of life? The interesting thing is that Paul so takes it for granted that his readers would know that he does not even list them. We must read them into the text from other places. He takes it for granted that they would know what his weapons are.

All of us face problems, normal, common problems -- depression, discouragement, ill health, lack of money, social pressures, family troubles, in-laws, greed, guilt, shame. As a society, we face problems together -- race tensions, war, poverty, air and water pollution, inflation, death, taxes, all these common problems.

These are the battles of life, are they not? Very few of us will have to fight on the battlefields of Vietnam, some will, but not all. Here are the battles of life. These are what Paul calls in this passage, *strongholds*. We shall look at that word more closely next week, but these are the strongholds he mentions, situations where evil is entrenched and powerful.

Yet he has adequate weapons for these. That is the thing I wish to convey to you now.

The Christian is not inadequate to deal with these things: He is the only one who is adequate to deal with them! Therefore, let us not waste our time with things that have proved their inadequacy long ago. We have adequate weapons. I can only briefly list them in this message. I shall have to develop them more as we go on in this passage, but it is important to have them before us at this moment. They come not from any one specific

passage but from the general thrust of Scripture, supported by many, many passages. I shall list for you four weapons of the Christian by which we can face the battles of life, and which, if he faces them with these weapons, will win. Not only will he win in his individual life, but he will be a tremendously powerful factor to solve them on the level of society as well.

1. First, we must place truth: Truth is the chief weapon of the Christian. I do not mean education. Education is usually seized upon by those attacking the problems of society as the most effective way of solving them. That very fact indicates that people see that knowledge of reality is a very important thing in solving problems, it is a powerful weapon. The only difficulty is that worldlings in general (and many Christians as well) equate education with knowledge of reality. But we must not do so. Secular education is a compound of truth and falsehood, both equally powerfully taught. Error is often conveyed as powerfully as truth, therefore education oftentimes serves only to enhance the problem. It does not always separate between the chaff and wheat; it is not always true.

But I am talking now about truth. The glory of Christianity is that it introduces truth into any situation. It reveals reality. Jesus Christ came, in the words of this present generation, to "tell it as it is" -- and he did so. Invariably, always, he told it as it is. He let people know the facts about life, and about man. He unveiled reality, he tore away the illusions and delusions under which men labor. He ripped off veils. You can watch him exposing the faulty thinking of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and all the other groups with which he came in contact, including his own disciples. Here, in the Word of God, in the truth as it is in Jesus, we have a powerful weapon, the greatest one there is in many respects, telling things the way they are.

One of the reasons why the group of laymen from this area who have been traveling to college campuses have found such an effective ministry is that they do not try to impress the students with displays of erudition and worldly wisdom. They simply talk about life as the Scriptures reveal it. It is surprising how this grasps, moves, and captures the minds and thoughts of this present generation.

Truth is the stock in trade of a Christian, that is, if he accepts the Word of God as the truth about life, and if he proclaims it, and demonstrates it in his own life, he himself is a mighty weapon for setting men free and for solving the ills of society. Not only truth proclaimed, but truth demonstrated: The weakness of the church is that it has often been too content to simply proclaim a portion of the truth and never give itself to the demonstration of it. But a Christian, above all others, ought to be characterized by openness and honesty. Let me quote to you a paragraph or two from an article in *Eternity* magazine entitled: *The Slickest Gimmick of All*:

There is a potency and wholesomeness in living life transparently rather than endlessly erecting poses and postures and fraudulent pieties.

That is a descriptive word for much of Christianity, isn't it? Fraudulent pieties!

This modern world of ours is generously supplied with pitchmen and con artists and those who have axes to grind. These are enthusiastically and persistently using the big lie on us. Hence, it is an arresting and refreshing experience to meet a person or a group that is authentic and transparently open.

That is what every Christian ought to be, and every Christian group. I was distressed this week to learn of an evangelical church that is teaching its people that they have the right to privacy in their lives. No Christian has the right to a private life. Our lives are to be lived openly before all men, transparent, a spectacle unto all the world. We have no private lives and we must not expect to have. This is basically and fundamentally wrong. Christians are to be demonstrations of the truth. This article goes on,

The church where Jesus Christ is openly and honestly confessed is a potent commodity particularly needed in our disillusioned, jaded civilization. Many weary people want to find a place where God's Word is revered, taught, and translated into daily life. At least that's the kind of church I want for my

family. Not a church posing this week as a circus, next week as a sociological supermarket, next month as a pietistic political polarization within the ecclesiastical community; but a church which purports in its proclamation to be what it is -- the body of Christ -- a fellowship where Christ's people come together for renewal, for instruction in God's word, and for sharing in the spread of the gospel.

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free," {John 8:32 NIV}.

2. The second weapon is love. I know this is the most overworked word in our vocabulary today, but let's be specific: I am not talking about the Hollywood slush that passes for love, nor of the bleeding heart tolerance of anything that comes along, I am talking about biblical love, the kind that requires no return from the individual loved. That is love, the kind that is described in First Corinthians 13, the kind that loves for Christ's sake. If you cannot love that way then you are not a Christian, no matter what kind of a creed you subscribe to. If you can, then you must begin to show acceptance, courtesy, and concern without partiality or merit, without regard to the background or the color of skin or anything else about an individual, except that he or she is a man or woman loved by God for whom Christ died. Your love must go out to them, not your momentary interest until you gain their adherence to your creed; but your genuine love, demanding nothing in return.

That is love, and that is a mighty weapon. That is the way the early church won their way against councils and governors, kings and edicts, and everything else. They won it by the demonstration of a warmth of acceptance that made their meetings such glorious occasions of fellowship that the whole world hung around, drooling, wanting to get in.

3. The third weapon is righteousness. Fundamentally, that means obedience to both truth and love. It is what we call integrity. It is the refusal to yield to expediency. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do," {Eph 4:17b}. You cannot go on excusing your weaknesses. There are no excuses left to you; you have all that it takes to be all that is needed. You cannot go on justifying your failures. You have no reason for failure. You must stop your lying, your stealing, your cursing, your immorality, and your harshness toward one another, your unforgiveness, your jealousy and your petulance. But in its place, because righteousness is never just negative, you must show tenderheartedness, acceptance and forgiveness for Christ's sake -- the warmth of love. It is true that if all you can hold up on behalf of your righteous standing is that you don't smoke, drink, gamble or go to movies, etc., you are a pitiful spectacle of a Christian. If you are a Christian there must be about your life a quality that cannot be explained in terms of your personality -- a positive glow, a warmth, and a radiance which cannot be explained except by the fact that God is at work in you.
4. The fourth weapon is a compound one. I shall put it this way: Faith-prayer. I put the two together because they are almost indistinguishable. Faith is reliance on the direct activity of God in human life. Prayer is the request for that activity; faith is the expectation that God will do it. These two things link together. If you do not think they are powerful, I suggest you read through Hebrews 11. There is a list of the achievements of faith in society, in terms of government, warfare, social ills, and battles of every kind. Faith is the expectation that God has not dismissed society, nor does he exist remote from it, but he is involved in it, and is active in it. He is moving; he does things; he changes; he arrests; he thwarts; he overthrows; he builds up and exalts; and he does all this in answer and through the medium of prayer. I do not know how to put it any stronger, but in the coming messages on this I want to outline more fully to you what prayer is, and how it works. What a mighty weapon is put in our hands in these days through this means!

There they are: truth, love, righteousness, and faith-prayer. These are the weapons of our warfare. They are not carnal, they are not of the flesh, they are not of the world; but they are mighty. They have divine power to the eliminating of strongholds, pulling down high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. They all work together. You can hardly isolate the one from the other; they are all necessary. And when the church begins to major on these weapons she will once again become a mighty power in society, a tremendously potent force, a ferment let loose which will rapidly change the outward circumstances, the face of things as they are. Then the church will once again be

what God designed it to be -- in those glowing words in the Song of Solomon, an army "Bright as the moon, glorious as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," {cf, Song 6:10}

## Prayer

Our gracious Father, what a challenge you set before us in these words! How much they call us to review of our own lives in the light of these thundering declarations! Grant to us, our Father, that we may see the challenge of the hour in which we live, and realize that we have been uniquely called to do the only thing that counts in this day and age. Help us to give ourselves to it through Jesus Christ our Lord, for we pray in his mighty, triumphant name, Amen.

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