

August 25, 2013  
©Rick Myatt

## A CALL TO ARMS 2 Corinthians 10:1-4

You've probably heard some of the classic instructional lines from various military publications. Here are a few I like:

- To infantry soldiers: Try to look unimportant: the enemy may be low on ammunition
- From an army article on equipment maintenance, "A slipping gear could cause your M203 grenade launcher to fire when you don't expect it. This would make you quite unpopular in what's left of your unit."
- To new infantry officer: If an attack is going too well you are probably walking into an ambush.
- If you see an explosive ordnance disposal technician running, try to keep up with him.
- When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is not our friend.

Those are somewhat humorous, but the truth is there is nothing funny about combat. This has been driven home to us this year as Michael, our son-in-law, has been in Afghanistan. Though he has been in a relatively safe location, it is more than a little disturbing to talk to him on skype and see him wearing a helmet and body armor, then to have the conversation interrupted by explosions at his end.

Even though he is not an infantry officer Michael periodically goes to the shooting range to practice in order to stay proficient in the use of weapons, because it is always possible that he may have to use them. Today I want to talk to you about being proficient in the use of some weapons, for we are in a spiritual combat zone. There's a war on and we all will have to fight. So we'd better be ready to use our weapons. This is crucial to being antifragile in a war zone. To be antifragile is to experience chaos and stress, in this case the chaos of conflict, and not only be strong through it but to actually grow from it. For that to happen we will have to use the proper weapons and fight the right way. Today we will look at 2 Corinthians 10:1-4, a passage in which our weapons are a topic of discussion.

### PAUL FOUGHT OPPOSITION AND CRITICISM

This letter was written because of all the upheaval that had gone on in the Corinthian church. People had come to Corinth seeking to undercut Paul's ministry

there. Some of them were false teachers trying to sway Christians from the truth, but some were just people trying to supplant Paul so they could have their own following. They appealed to the often overweening pride of the Corinthians, some of whom joined in the rebellion against Paul and added their criticisms of him. The tactic these people used was to criticize Paul's leadership.

This tactic of trying to undermine an opponent by tearing him down is common among human beings. Where there are more than two human beings there will be someone subtly digging at someone else so as to undermine his position. Last month we visited our friends in Oregon. Mike is the football coach at Oregon State University. Soon he will have more wins than any coach in OSU history. He is widely known as one of the best coaches in the country and the nicest and most upbeat man in sports. You would think this would make him highly valued by all in the university, and for the most part this is true. Yet while we were there he had to deal with a member of the administration who had been going around criticizing him, planting negative thoughts in alumni, some in the sports program, even the chef for the athletic department. Our friend was receiving concerned reports back from numerous people about that guy's activity. Why would he do this? I assume he thought it would somehow get him more power or it was because of jealousy. The point is it happens all the time and it happened to Paul.

You can see some of the criticisms alluded to in this chapter. In verse 1 Paul uses some sarcasm when he says, "I, Paul, who am 'timid' when face to face with you, but 'bold' when away." When he had visited them before he appealed to them with the "meekness and gentleness of Christ." Some people interpreted this as weakness. They said, "Oh, yeah, he writes these thunderous letters, but when he's face to face he's a wimp." Then again in verse 10, "Some say 'his letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.'" I've had people use that last line on me behind my back.

Paul apparently wasn't a dynamic speaker nor was he a charismatic and dynamic guy in person. Some in Corinth decided they'd grown beyond him. They wanted somebody who was more scintillating in his public speaking and was a more dynamic leader. They wanted a more titillating message than what they heard from Paul, which was a constant message about the cross of Jesus and God's grace.

Paul had to deal with the rebels and the grumblers because what was at stake was the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only standard those early Christians had of what was true was the teaching of the apostles, especially Paul for the Gentile churches

like Corinth. Paul knew if they rejected him and his message they were instantly open to all kinds of error and the results would be cataclysmic for the church.

Paul had to fight back. In verse 3 he said “we do not wage war as the world does,” but he did wage war. In verse 4 he said “the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” He did fight. He used the word *strateuomai*, from which we get our word “strategy.” It meant go to war, do battle. This is a militaristic image, and Paul meant it to be such. He was fighting a war that had eternal consequences.

We, too, will have to fight. Everyone is going to have to fight because everywhere in the world humans are at war with each other. In his description of fallen human nature Paul quoted Isaiah in Romans 3:17 when he said of all of us “the way of peace they do not know.” Because the human soul is dedicated to self we are all in competition with and at war with each other.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul said of the Corinthians they were not spiritual, but worldly. How did he know? In verse 3 he wrote, “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” In other words, “mere humans,” meaning people as we are in our natural state, will always be known for jealousy and quarreling. That’s why people cannot get along with each other. So if you plan to have any contact with other human beings, planning on dealing with conflict. *The question isn’t whether we will fight. We have no choice. In this world there will be war and you must fight, so the question is **how** will we fight?*

In his book *Reason In The Balance* Philip Johnson said, “the most influential intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, educators, politicians and judges in America...are all naturalists.” He defined naturalists as those who believe only in the physical world. They think God and the spiritual realm are fantasy and superstition. They also believe that anyone who believes in God is a threat to their freedom and must have no place in public life. God cannot be allowed in education, government, social policy, law or public life. The media are the same. These are the people who control our media, universities, courts, government and our schools. We are in a struggle with those people, for we believe they could not be more wrong or more misguided.

It is important that we clearly identify exactly what it is we are fighting for. Too many Christians lose sight of the fact that what we must be about is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is our real hope and the power of God, not about controlling

our culture so that it is more Christian looking. Yet the fact is, we are in a battle. The battle is for people's hearts, for their very souls. The question is, how are we going to fight that battle? The people we fight against are so deeply entrenched, so powerful and there are so many of them. How are we to resist them? We must use the right kinds of weapons, which I will get to in just a few moments.

On top of that we are going to have personal battles. We will have conflict with people at work, at school, in our neighborhoods, in our own families, sometimes even in our church. That is just a fact of life. Laurie and I are pretty low on the conflict scale. We are very much alike, we both value love and relationship over having our own way for the most part, we both love each other desperately and we communicate with each other very well. This makes for a peaceful and harmonious relationship. But we still have our conflicts.

As an example, we went on a trip to Washington and Oregon recently to visit family and friends. The impetus of the trip was my brother's last Sunday at the church he pastored for 31 years. We wanted to be there for that big event as his church had a celebration of his years of faithful service and a going away party. That Sunday evening they had the big party at the church and they reserved the front row for Jerry's family. Laurie and I went to the event separately due to transportation constraints. And Laurie got there late. So there I was sitting by myself in the front row when one of the first things they wanted to do was introduce Jerry's family to the congregation. Well, that was inconvenient since Laurie wasn't there yet. When they introduced me they asked about Laurie. I said (taking it on faith) that she was on her way and would be there shortly, which is why she's known as the late Laurie Myatt. Honestly I was a little peeved that we had traveled 1200 miles to be there for the event and she couldn't show up on time. She did show up and was a little embarrassed that she had to walk all the way down to the front row in front of everyone. She gave me one of those, "Why didn't you tell me we were sitting in the front row?" under the breath questions. I whispered back, "I didn't know. Why didn't you come on time?" The conflict was on. Later someone relayed to her the "late Laurie Myatt" comment. She was slightly less than thrilled with it, even though I thought it was rather humorous. In retrospect it is not hard to identify the main culprit on that one. Looking back on it I concluded that referring to my wife as the late Laurie Myatt might not have caused her to feel especially honored. And I also learned that she was dealing with a bothersome health issue that day, which was a significant factor in her arrival time. One would think her husband could have been a little more understanding of this problem. But as you see even we have our little encounters. We all have them. How will we fight them?

## PAUL USED SPECIAL WEAPONS

In the parlance of modern American military “special weapons” are usually nuclear weapons. They are in a special category because they are the most devastating weapons known to the human race. They are the ultimate threat. That’s what we typically think we want for fighting our battles, some spiritual nukes that will wipe out the opposition and leave nothing but a smoking hole in the ground. Yeah, boy, that’ll show them!

Paul had some special weapons too, only they weren’t nuclear. They were more powerful than that. As awesome as the power of a nuclear weapon is it pales in comparison to the weapons that Paul fought with. He said his weapons had “divine power.” Divine power is on a scale that is literally beyond our comprehension. For instance, our largest nuclear power plants put out a whopping 5,000 megawatts of energy. The sun puts out as much energy every second as 2.5 billion large nuclear power plants would produce in a year (if that many existed). And the sun is just an average star, one among billions in the universe. Weapons with divine power will be powerful beyond human measure.

First let’s understand what these weapons are not. Paul said in verse 4 that we do not employ the weapons of the world. Literally he said they are not weapons of the flesh. That means they are not the weapons that people use in their normal interactions. What are those weapons? This chapter gives us a clue what they are. Some among the Corinthians demanded a leader who was more dynamic and more charismatic than Paul. They wanted one who was more impressive, a more riveting and powerful speaker. How would Paul fight such criticism?

That hits home for me personally. This year I received some ads inviting me to come to a national pastor’s conference that had a sparkling array of speakers. Let me tell you how they were described. One of them was Greg Laurie, whose name you no doubt know. The promo material said he started in ministry with 30 people in a Bible study. That group became a church that now averages over 15,000 people. Bruce Frank, I was told, leads a church recognized as one of the 100 fastest growing in America. They have two campuses, are about to open a third and have 6,000 people attending. Fred Luter took leadership of a church of 65 people in 1986 that today numbers over 7000. Matt Carter started with a group of 15 in 2002 and now, 11 years later, the church has over 8000 people coming each week.

What message would you hear from that? What I heard was “Hey Myatt, you stink.” The message is, this is what a pastor should be and do. Look at what

they've done. They all caused their churches to grow to an enormous size, in some cases as big as decent sized towns. You'd better come to this conference and learn how they did it so you can stink less. You need to figure out how to be successful and clearly they know how to do it, so do what they did.

I certainly do not wish to imply that any of those men who spoke at that conference are using the weapons of the flesh. No doubt they are all godly men. However, by putting them up front and promoting the conference as they did the message is that it is up to you, pastor, to figure out how to do what they have done. You need to have better skills, better methods, be a better leader and if you do maybe you can have the kinds of results they have had.

Having better skills and methods, being a better leader are good. But are those our weapons? If they are, we will likely see results by human measures. But do those weapons have divine power? Clearly they do not. They have only human power. Paul might have easily been tempted to fight back with the weapons of this world. He might have been tempted to try to impress people with his knowledge, his skill or his dynamic personality. If he did he would never have wielded divine power.

Pastor and author John MacArthur correctly identifies the weapons of the flesh as human wisdom...human plans, strategies, ingenuity, organization, skill, eloquence, personality, cleverness and so on. I would add to that power, manipulation and shame are other weapons that humans try to wield against each other. People use those weapons to fight battles on the human plane all the time. They use those weapons to sell cars and clothes. They use them to advance their career. They use them to convince other people to vote for their candidate or their bill. They use them to win conflicts with other people and to get them to do what they want.

Angry words, gossip about others, marshaling allies to force others to our way, threats, power, all these things are weapons of flesh. Those weapons can appear to accomplish things but they do not have divine power. They cannot win the battles that Paul had to fight, nor can they win our most important battles.

We tend to do what Paul described in verse 7. "You are looking only on the surface of things." That is what the Corinthians did. How does it look? Does it impress people? Those are the things we think about and the result is we end up running around firing bb guns at battleships. My brother Jerry told me about a book he read that was about World War I that contained some appalling information. Early in that war, which was the first one in which tanks were used, some great generals who had been cavalry soldiers all their lives, insisted on sending soldiers out on

horseback carrying lances to attack tanks. They were certain that a cavalry charge would win the day. But the stupidity of that is obvious isn't it? As dumb as that might be you'd be better off attacking a tank with a bow and arrow than you would be doing battle with human weapons.

We need something more powerful than these human weapons. What are these weapons of divine power?

### *The Gospel of grace*

Paul was tempted to trot out his great knowledge and argue philosophy and theology with people. He might have wanted to blow them away with his brilliance. But he did not do that. In 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 Paul wrote, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its **power**. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Again he wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 "When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

That statement "I resolved..." tells us that he had to make a deliberate choice. It literally meant he judged, he decided this. He made a choice of the will. The Corinthians, who lived in the philosophical shadow of the great intellects of Athens, prided themselves on being intelligent and on knowing and debating the latest philosophies. Paul was tempted to use human weapons there and try to wow them with his knowledge. But he decided wisely not to do that. Instead he **chose** to know nothing among them except Christ and his cross.

The gospel is still powerful. It seems humble. It is in the eyes of the intelligentsia of our nation foolishness that is only believed by narrow minded simpletons. But it is still the power of God, and when the lofty ideas of the elite of our land have dissolved into dust the truth of God will still stand. Hebrews 4:12 says "for the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God."

God's truth seems so simple, even so mundane to some who love esoteric ideas. Yet it is incredibly powerful. Do you know who David Tyree is? He is a former wide receiver who played for the New York Giants. He is well known for one

catch. It was a nearly miraculous catch in Super Bowl XLII. In the dramatic final minutes of that game he went high in the air grabbed the ball and pinned it to his helmet for a catch that set up the winning score as the Giants defeated New England 17-14. What you may not know is that Tyree had a troubled life. He was addicted to drugs and alcohol all through high school and college. As a rookie he was arrested for selling drugs. He now admits his life was in disarray and he had no peace. As a response to his arrest he picked up a Bible and began reading it. He read the message of grace, of redemption in Christ and put his faith in Jesus. The power of God's truth changed his life. He is now sober, married and serving God. He says his is more than just a feel good story. It is about destiny and purpose.

When we are faced with conflict with other people, when we face the opposition of the world, it is crucial that we wield this weapon. **That means that we not only speak it, but that we live by it.** It must be our message and what we trust in.

### *The meekness and gentleness of Christ*

Notice that in verse 1 Paul said he appealed to the Corinthians in the "humility and gentleness of Christ." Some translations have "meekness and gentleness." In fact, that was one of the reasons he was criticized by some in Corinth. He didn't thunder away at them, but he appealed to them in love.

Meekness and gentleness can easily be interpreted as weakness. But they are not weakness. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Was Jesus weak? Given that he was able to make a storm stop raging simply by ordering it to "knock it off," go for a stroll on a lake by walking across the water, produce a feast for 10,000 people out of a couple of fish tacos and to conquer death itself I would have to say that he was not weak. If he had that much power what do you think he could have done to someone who opposed him if he chose to do so? Strike them blind, make them go deaf, be unable to speak, experience sudden paralysis, or even drop dead on the spot. He could have done any of that, yet what he did was love people, give to them, and finally die to save them. That is real meekness and humility. It is not about what one has the power to do, but what one chooses to do.

In Ephesians 4:2 Paul wrote "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." There is that same spirit of gentleness or meekness. In Colossians 3:12 Paul wrote that we should clothe ourselves with this quality. While we may not think so, it is a powerful weapon we can wield as we fight.



In his book, *Changing The World Through Kindness*, Steve Sjogren tells a story about an occasion when he and others from his church were going through their community just trying to do kind things for people. He was part of a group that went from one business or home to another offering to clean their toilets. They walked into a carpet store and said they were Christians and they wanted to clean the store's toilets. The woman working there was suspicious and not happy. She said "you're what, and you want to do what?" Sjogren said, "We are followers of Christ and we just want to serve people." The woman said, "I have a good mind to call the cops, get out of the store." They turned to go and she relented. She said, "Fine, if it makes you feel good, go ahead." They went into the restrooms and cleaned them. When done they came out and headed for the door. The woman, who was dealing with a customer snapped, "Wait, before you go I want to talk to you." Sjogren waited while she finished with the customer, expecting her to blast him for some reason. She asked, "You're from the church down the street, aren't you?" Thinking she wanted to complain he answered, "Yes, did we do something wrong?" She said, "I'm only 29 years old, but I've already thoroughly messed up my life. I've been addicted to alcohol and cocaine. I've had a child but I've never been married. I'm in a dead end job. My life feels shattered. As you were cleaning our toilets a question popped into my mind. Would an addicted, messed up person like me fit in your church?" What made the difference for her was the gentleness and kindness of Christ. Rather than being put off by her gruff attitude they had simply replied with patience, gentleness and kindness, and that was the most powerful thing they could have done.

### ***Faith in a powerful God***

In his two letters to the Corinthians Paul had to deal with their quarreling and bickering, their competition to prove who is most spiritual, their arrogance, their acceptance of appalling sin, their suing one another, their idolatry, their rebellion against him and their unwarranted criticism of him and more. Yet look at 1 Corinthians 1:8. Speaking of Jesus Christ Paul wrote, "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What could possibly make Paul sure that they would be strong to the end and blameless on the day of Christ? It surely was not their performance and the example of the stellar lives. It was his confidence in God and his work in them. You can see what Paul prayed for the Corinthians in the very last verse of 2 Corinthians. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Paul knew if that prayer was answered, and he knew it would be, the Corinthians would be strong to the end. Paul was able to trust God's work in people, and this is what allowed him to be

patient, humble, gentle and kind with them. He knew as we saw in 2 Corinthians 2:14 that God always leads us in his triumph in Christ.

I told the story a while back about one of my foolish and idiotic moments. I got a phone call one day from this woman with a pronounced Indian accent who informed me that they had been given notifications that our computer was about to have a meltdown. She used lots of words I didn't know as she showed me that the viral apocalypse was upon us. I actually allowed her to gain remote access to the computer before I woke up and began to suspect that something wasn't quite right. As soon as that thought took shape I put an end to what was going on and immediately called our IT consultant, our son Toby. I told him what happened and he said, "You didn't let her have access to your computer did you?" "Um, uh, well, uh, yeah, kinda." He was chagrined to find out that he had inherited genes from a total dunce. He told me he would come over and look at our computer later. In the interim I had visions of total cyber disaster that not only would lay waste to our computer but would include cataclysmic identity theft as well. But I have total confidence in our IT guy. He told me what to do to protect our assets. When he came over I handed him the computer and let him do his thing. I experienced relief, knowing that he would solve any problems and that when he was done our computer would be restored to full function again. I was able to relax because I trust him.

That is a terrific weapon we wield in the conflicts we face. We can hand them to God. We can pray about them then trust him. We don't have to grab hold and force everything and everyone to go the way we want because our God is great, because he is the sovereign who will always lead us in his triumph. We don't have to control and manipulate and finagle every way we can imagine to get the outcome we desire. We can rest and not fret. This is why Paul was so confident that the Corinthians would be strong to the end. It wasn't his ability to make them so nor was it their obvious great strength, it was God's work in them. This makes us able to deal with people with humility, patience and kindness no matter what they do, and discover that the meekness and gentleness of Christ combine with his truth and his power, not our power, will always win the day.

## CONCLUSION

Before we meet again, maybe before this day is over, you will have to fight. It may be a fight with a grumpy spouse, or with a difficult neighbor, or with someone who is opposed to all that you stand for as a follower of Jesus. Fight with the weapons against which there is no defense. Trust in and live out and proclaim the gospel of grace, respond with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and have faith in God.

How do you know what weapons you are using when you fight? Here are some clues, tell tale signs that indicate what weapons you are using.

#### THE WEAPONS OF THE FLESH

- Promote and serve yourself
- Will cause division or distance
- Often are at the expense of others
- End with futility. Even if you get the outcome you desired you will discover it is not what you had hoped and not what was really needed and God definitely will not be the one glorified and served.

#### THE DIVINE WEAPONS

- Honor and serve God
- Lead to healing and unity
- Will bless others
- Cannot be stopped. No one can stop you from trusting God, living in the truth of the Gospel and relating to people with meekness and gentleness.

Recently we've had a relational rift occur in our neighborhood. We have wonderful neighbors, but two of them are having a problem. That's because one's dog attacked and almost killed the other's dog. The owner of the attacker is paying the vet bills, but has never apologized. There is now a broken relationship and the victim's owner is taking the other before the association's board. I've watched this and have realized that only one thing could heal that situation. If the woman were a follower of Jesus and used spiritual weapons rather than power and anger there could be healing. She might not control whether the other neighbor apologized and changed his behavior, but there could be healing. No one could stop her from doing that if she chose. That's the power of spiritual weapons.