

## **HOLY WAR**

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

September 9, 2007

It will be six years ago Tuesday. Six years! It was a Tuesday, then as well. Six years ago when we on the west coast woke up to the terrible news of what was happening in New York, at the Pentagon and in the lonely field in Pennsylvania.

The news came out bit by bit. Remember how confusing it was that day? I remember one broadcast reporting that a bomb had gone off at the State Department. The authorities were confused as well. I recommend that you see the movie "United 93" to get a sense of how confusing and fast-paced everything was to the air traffic authorities.

While the smoke was still covering New York like a shroud, it became clear who was behind the attack: a crazed man name Bin Ladin and his organization, Al Qaeda. These thugs and murderers styled themselves as *jihadis*, holy warriors, intent on taking down the west and demoralizing the United States in particular.

In the years since 911, some have come to the conclusion that all faiths have a potential for producing murderous fanatics. The last year or so have seen a flurry of atheist books attacking all religions as equally dangerous. Odd, I don't seem to recall any news stories about Presbyterian suicide bombers, Baptists making IEDs, Episcopalian kidnappings or Pentecostal hijackings. I must have missed it.

But there is a Holy War on. The Holy War that the New Testament speaks about has nothing to do with

guns, swords or bombs. There is a Holy War on, but it's a war for **heads** and **hearts**.

The central front in the real Holy War has already been fought and won. It was when Jesus defeated Satan on the cross. The prophecy was given way back in Genesis 3:15, where God says to Satan:

*And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.*

Here God promises that the woman's offspring would be in conflict with those who follow Satan's way. But God goes further: One will come who is totally at war, at **enmity** (hostility) with Satan's designs. In the battle, the outcome will be Satan getting his head crushed—a fatal blow—while he has His heel "stricken" by the devil—a serious, though not fatal, blow.

That was fulfilled on the cross. Jesus died, but He didn't stay dead. But the whole satanic scheme was dealt a deadly blow on the cross. Death and sin and Satan were defeated there: it was, in the phrase of Puritan theologian John Owen, "the death of death in the death of Christ."

So the central battle has been fought—and won. But there are thousands of side battles. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul gives us some guidance about the side battles. We can put it this way:

The **field of battle** is the mind and heart of people (vs. 1-6).

The **purpose of battle** is to build people up to the glory of God (7-11).

The **spirit of battle** is complete and humble reliance on God (12-18).

The **field of battle** is the mind and heart of people (vs. 1-6).

***1**By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! **2**I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. **3**For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **4**The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. **5**We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. **6**And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.*

Let me set the stage. In chapter 10-13 of 2 Corinthians, Paul is back on offense as he takes on a minority of confused believers and their deceivers. Paul is making a pitch to them, and he says it's like waging war. No swords or catapults, though. The weapons we fight with have "divine power" and they involve "arguments, pretensions and thoughts."

Spiritual war is being waged all around us. While our enemy at times resorts to bombs, or swords or crucifixion or intimidation, that's not the Jesus way.

The Jesus way aims for the heart and the mind. Jesus never tried to bully His way into people's lives. He worked His way in by words of truth and deeds of love. Think of the woman at the well in Samaria (the story is in John 4). He directly confronted her immorality (she wasn't a serial murderer, but she was a serial marry-er, currently living with a boyfriend). He met her at the heart level, but then went on to meet her at the mind level when she asked questions about worship at the Jerusalem Temple.

There's a place for apologetics—not the science of **apologizing**, but the **reasoned defense** of the Christian faith. We have great books and tapes in the church library by Josh McDowell and by Lee Stroebel that deal with the reasoned defense of the faith. Check them out! Our faith isn't just a tradition that asks you to check your brain in a basket by the door.

In Paul's situation, it isn't so much that people rejected Jesus outright so much as they were being affected by a distortion of the faith, a distortion that made Jesus easier to swallow by making His message conform to the lifestyle of the Corinthians. Paul is determined not to let this happen. But his way of dealing with this is to appeal to the heart and to the mind, not to bully or threaten people.

Where is the church in America being pulled to make it conform to American culture in violation of the teaching of Jesus? Well, where do we start? In some quarters, the gospel is turned into a means to get rich. Someone told me of a popular TV preacher who told his congregation, "Look at your shoes! Tell me, are those the shoes of a child of the king?" Then he strutted around in his \$400 shoes and said, "Now those are the shoes of a child of God!" Aw! I thought I was going to get sick.

The gospel is hijacked by politics on the left and the right. I saw a bumper sticker saying, "Who would Jesus bomb?" Interesting thought. I wonder if anyone makes a bumper sticker saying, "Who would Jesus abort?" Another organization rented billboards saying, "Jesus was a vegetarian." Hard to explain the lamb eaten at Passover time, then. At the same time, maybe it's just me, it's hard for me to see Jesus driving a pickup with an NRA sticker.

In addition, Jesus' message gets distorted by tradition. That can be Orthodox or Catholic or Baptist tradition. For millions of Americans, Jesus and His message are buried under the weight of hundreds of years of tradition. Unfortunately, that tradition can be like a

heavy cloud cover. You can tell that the sun is up—that Jesus is there—but you can only guess at where the sun is. His glory is covered over with layers of cloudy gunk.

Paul would have us appeal to the mind and the heart as we represent **the unclouded Jesus**, the real Jesus, not some cheap copy.

If the field of battle is the mind and heart, the **purpose of battle** is to build people up to the glory of God (7-11).

I'm going with the alternate translation of vs. 7a, which you'll find in the margin of the NIV:

*7 Look at the obvious facts. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. 8 For even if I boast somewhat freely about **the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down**, I will not be ashamed of it. 9 I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. 10 For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing." 11 Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.*

There's a lot in there, but I want to focus on just one part: Paul says the authority given Him by the Lord is for "building you up rather than pulling you down." The **purpose** of the spiritual battle is never to destroy; it's to build people up.

This spring and summer the ARCO station just down from the church was transformed. It went from an old, beat-up but pleasant station into a new super-duper station. To get from A to B required some "pulling down" before you got to the "building up."

Let's take this out the realm of teaching into the realm of living for a second. Many times the door into a fuller life with God starts with "pulling down." When God is at work in our lives, pulling down is not the objective; building up is. But we often have to start with some pulling down.

So a Christian co-worker says to us, "Look, I see the way you're flirting with Mandy. I've seen where this can lead. Do I have to remind you that you're a married man?" That's a moment of pulling down designed to lead to building up: a stronger, surer, God-honoring marriage.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus, we need to realize that we are to engage in continual spiritual warfare on behalf of one another. We are called to pray for one another. We are called to watch out for one another. We are not called to be silent because it may upset someone. We have to open our heart and our mouth for one another. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." There is no "gotcha" here. This is how we show love. This is how we love and build one another up, all done in a spirit of humility.

This leads right into the last point: the **spirit of battle** is complete and humble reliance on God (12-18).

***12**We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. **13**We, however, will not **boast** beyond proper limits, but will confine our **boasting** to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. **14**We are not going too far in our **boasting**, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you*

*with the gospel of Christ. **15**Neither do we go beyond our limits by **boasting** of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, **16**so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to **boast** about work already done in another man's territory. **17**But, "Let him who **boasts boast** in the Lord." **18**For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

There are complicated issues in this text that we don't have the time to go into now. I just want you to notice one thing: the attitude that Paul has toward pride or "boasting." There's just no place for it. The false teachers are full of boasting. (Just think of the TV preacher and his "shoes" comment.)

The people of God have one and only one basis to boast: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." That's a quote from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 9:24). The idea "boasting in the Lord" is simple: instead of boasting in what you have accomplished with your life, boasting in the Lord means that you celebrate what God has done in your life. It's a celebration of God's greatness and God's grace.

We engage in spiritual warfare as humble warriors since the Lord Himself is the real warrior. One Old Testament title of God is *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the Lord of Hosts. This title occurs over 270 times in the Bible. The Message translates this as "God of the Angel Armies" which is really pretty good. God is the main warrior, so all that's left to us is a humble place in the rear of the battle.

So there is a Holy War on, and we have a part. The **battlefield** is in the mind and the heart. The **purpose of the battle** is to build people up. And

the way we go to battle, the **spirit of battle** is one of complete and humble reliance on God. We can't win the battle, or even come close. The Lord of Hosts goes before us.

What does this mean in practical terms? What difference does this make? Let me make a couple of quick observations.

**First, you're at war, not at peace.** We are struggling for the victory of God in our own lives, in the life of our church and in our community. We pray, "Your will be done, on earth and it is in heaven." To even pray that way recognizes that not all is as it should be. We're called to a war footing.

**Second, we wage war first for our own lives before God.** The battle starts in here, in our own hearts. We look there to seek God's cleansing and to recommit ourselves in love to Him.

**Third, we pray for one another, knowing that we have an enemy.** 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

**Fourth, we contend for the truth of the message of Jesus.** Paul was willing to fight it out over truth decay in the church in Corinth. As a matter of fact, most New Testament letters deal at least in part with the errors of false teachers. What you believe matters. It matters that Jesus is fully God, and that He died on the cross for you, and that He rose on the third day. It matters when we think of whether or not we regard the Bible as the fully inspired Word of God or if we think it's the record of man's words about God. It matters because holding to God's truth brings Him glory builds people up. And

if we walk away from that truth, God doesn't get the glory He deserves and people don't get built up.

There was a story *in National Geographic* about the Alaskan Bull Moose. The males of the species battle for dominance during the fall breeding season, literally going head-to-head with antlers crunching together as they collide. Often their antlers, their only weapon, are broken. When that happens, you're out of luck. The strongest moose, with the largest and strongest antlers, triumphs.

You know what that means? The battle fought in the fall is really won during the summer, when the moose eat continually. The one that consumes the best diet for growing antlers and gaining weight will be the heavyweight in the fight. The ones who don't eat right don't get strong enough and don't bulk up.

There is a lesson here for us. Spiritual warfare is ahead. Satan will choose a season to attack. Will we be victorious, or will we fall? Much depends on what we do now--before the battle begins. Think of it as the Bull Moose principle: if you want to win, eat richly from God's word, drink freely in worship and prayer, graze thoroughly in godly fellowship and Biblical teaching. Fall is coming. Are you ready for the battle?

END

PRAYER