

I stand before you today, as a defeated man.

- Christ has fought for me;
- Christ has captured me; and
- Christ is defeating and punishing, every nefarious scheme, that is seeking to take me away from Him again.

I am most definitely a defeated and captured man, but there is no way that I'm going to hang my head in shame (at the defeat). And nor will I drag my feet in defeat... Because Christ has won me, and now I belong to Him. And to be a captive of Christ, is pure joy...

Last week, Paul was using agricultural terminology (sowing generously & reaping generously / sparingly). And agricultural terminology – that's alright isn't it – most people don't mind that...

But this week, Paul's using **military** terminology... And the thing with military terminology – well, some folk aren't so keen on that – it offends their sensibilities. The very thought of things 'military' is so offensive to some people, they couldn't **possibly** condone using such language/similes/metaphors in the church...

And if you're offended by military terminology, you'll probably get offended by a fair bit of what you read in the Bible. And you might feel a bit uncomfortable with the terminology we're going to use today, but I'm not going to apologise for that.

We're in a war. We're in a spiritual battle...

- It's a battle for hearts and minds.

- It's a battle of truth against lies; and
- Worldly opinion against the wisdom of God

Be in no doubt – it's a war between Satan and Christ... And we're right in the thick of it.

It's a war that finds its way into the church, and is often fought at a congregational level... It's a war where Satan's evil attack, often comes from outside – outsiders, bringing new and strange teachings, to a church that has long been faithful to Christ....

Righto, we're studying what we know as Paul's 2nd letter to the church in Corinth (4th).

And at Chapter 10 of this letter, it seems to take a distinct change in direction and tone... So much so, that some people think it's actually another letter that's been tacked on... But I don't agree – it flows well enough for me.

But in this section, Paul is mounting a defence for himself... We've already seen glimpses of Paul defending himself in other parts of his letter....

You're probably sick of me saying this, but for any new listeners, I'll say it again:

Paul planted the church in Corinth. But when he left that church, to go and plant some more churches in other places, some **false** apostles (from out of town), came into Corinth and staked **their** claim upon the church... And they brought false teaching into that church. And as part of their take-over, they

tried to discredit the Apostle Paul, to take his power away from him.

Righto, so Paul is trying to pull this church back on track. And at the same time, he has to deal with the false apostles undermining him. And understandably, he's got some pretty harsh words to say to them...

But, apparently, that's a bit out of character for Paul. It seems his demeanour (in person) was usually quite meek and gentle... And reading-between-the-lines, it's pretty obvious that they poke-fun-at-him – *“He seems all very tough when he writes his letters, but in person, he's **weak**”*...

And Paul defends himself: “I'm writing this letter in meekness and gentleness, but unless you change your ways, I'm going to be pretty jolly tough when I come.” (my paraphrase)

You see, with the Gospel, there's a time for meekness; there's a time for gentleness... But in **defence** of the Gospel, sometimes, there's a need for toughness...

*I used to be a minister in a particular mainstream denomination... And all sorts of false teachings were coming into that denomination... And what that church needed, was for a God-appointed leader – a man of God to stand up, and take a strong stand in defence of the Gospel. And to be tough, against the few, who twisted the Scriptures, and discredited the Gospel... But the way **of** that church, was to make a place for all sorts of views...*

And in that church, anybody who unyieldingly opposed the false teachers in defence of the Gospel – well, they're pretty much all gone now – there was no place for them in that church...

Sometimes, in defence of the Gospel, we need to be tough...

To liberate/restore the position of this church – to get them back on track again, Paul was going to have to launch a military campaign (as it were) – a Spiritual Battle, which involved:

- Destruction;
- Capture; and
- Punishment

But before he launched the campaign, first he had to understand the arsenal – the arsenal that would be used against him, and the weapons that were available for **him** to use.

V³ For though we walk in the flesh (though we live in the world), we are not waging war according to the flesh.

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are **not of the flesh** but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

There's been periods of history, where terrible atrocities – military campaigns, have been carried out in the name of the church, and in the Name of Christ. Political ambition; Desires for conquest and **Greed**, have used Christianity as an excuse to wage war...

That's waging war according to the flesh..

As disciples of Jesus, we do **not** wage war according to the flesh... Now, I want to be very clear here – I'm not pushing a 'pacifist – never go to war' thing... In fact, as disciples of Jesus, it is our duty to be good citizens in the country in which we live. And our country needs Christians in the armed forces... And if God is calling you to a career in the military, don't ever be put off because you worry that a military career might be at odds with your faith... In **any** job – in any career, there **will** be times that you will behave very differently to your fellow workers, and sometimes you won't be popular because of that. And it's no different in the armed forces... But being a Christian, and being fair-dinkum in your faith, is no barrier to serving...

Right, so what are the weapons? the weapons of our warfare are **not of the flesh** but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, he told them about the Spiritual armour: Ephesians 6: ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And that's why it then goes on to describe "that's why we need to put on the armour of God"... And of course, if we read the description of the armour of God, there's nothing

mysterious or mystical about it – **it's how we live...** To put on the armour of God, is to live in righteousness and obedience, as Jesus' faithful disciples...

- Belt of truth
- Breastplate of righteousness
- Shoes readiness of the Gospel
- Shield of faith
- Helmet of salvation
- Sword of the Spirit (word of God)

Alright, so there's nothing mysterious or mystical about it...

As we live as disciples of Jesus let's:

- Be truthful;
- Practice righteousness;
- Be ready to preach the Gospel;
- Keep the faith, and depend on faith;
- Trust in our salvation, and know that God has saved us;
- Read the word of God / know / obey / speak...

But you might say to me, "But Michael, I fail at that:

- My faith isn't very big;
- I've told some lies;
- I don't always do the right thing;
- I haven't been ready to share the Gospel – in fact, I've shied away from it;
- Sometimes I've doubted my salvation; and
- I haven't loved the Word of God like I should.

Do you know what you're telling me? In my own strength, I can't do this. And that's the whole point... That's why, this is the armour of God - not the armour of Michael. That's

why, these weapons of warfare, have divine power – because they're not my weapons – they're God's weapons.

The evidence that we've been born again, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives... How do I know if the Holy Spirit is present? Well, we **don't** look for certain gifts – that's **not** the answer. When the Holy Spirit is present in your life, He's changing you – Holy Spirit, is transforming you – you're not the same person you were. Your conscience is being tuned to God. Things that didn't used to bother you, bother you now...

And if we truly desire, for God to transform us into the person that He wants us to be, and if we pray for these things, and work with Him, by His Holy Spirit, He will:

- Give us more faith;
- Help us to delight in truth;
- Help us to do the right thing;
- He will empower us, to share the Gospel, when we step out to give it a go;
- And the closer we come to Him, the more we realise, the beauty of our salvation;
- And as our relationship with Christ deepens, we'll want to hear from Him more, and we'll love His Word...

Righto, so the weapons we have, aren't guns or swords – this isn't about burning heretics at the stake; or drowning witches; or shooting up mosques; or bombing abortion clinics...

the weapons of our warfare are **not of the flesh** but have **divine** power to destroy strongholds.

What's a stronghold? What are these strongholds we're talking about???

Well, the Greek word is literally a stronghold/fortress / it is a strong enemy position that's difficult to take...

Now, when we Christians start using 'Christianese' to try and make things sound super-spiritual, we might start talking about strongholds in relation to some kind of power that Satan has over a community/person/church – we talk about something that we need to pray and ask God to deal with, to set us free from its bondage...

And that's good. We need to do those things. We **need** to pray for God to set us free from such bondages...

But if that is our primary view of 'destroying strongholds', we're going to miss what Paul's talking about here... ,, because he actually tells us, what the stronghold is. (have **divine** power to destroy strongholds) v⁵ We **destroy** arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God

Are you getting this???

What are the strongholds of Satan?
It's words: Arguments and Opinions, that get raised against God... Actually, it's more specific than that: Remember, this battle that Paul's fighting, is within a church. Alright, this isn't an argument with an atheist outside of the church. In the Corinthian church, there were arguments, and lofty opinions being presented, against, what it really means to know God...

You see, the false apostles/teachers were teaching:

- Do this;
- be this;
- live like this;
- believe this;
- act like this,

and you'll know God better... But it was all so false... They were false teachers – they were false apostles...

And the Corinthians (who had been convinced by them), had allowed the stronghold, to take a position in their church. Satan had been building his fortress, right under their noses...

They thought they were being led to a **higher** knowledge – perhaps a more intellectual truth – perhaps something that was more in-tune with their culture... But it wasn't bringing them closer to God... It was arguments and lofty opinions **against** the knowledge of God...

I believe that the Christian church is being assailed by arguments and lofty opinions **against the knowledge of God** today, more than ever before.

*The most obvious example, is the so-called “progressive Christianity” movement... They **pride** themselves on their intellect. And instead of reading the Word of God, and seeing what God has to say on a matter, they start off with their own 'lofty' opinions.*

In their mind, God's way is old-fashioned; It's something the ancients who didn't know any better, used to believe, whereas them, they're much smarter than that... And filled with pride, they elevate their opinions on all sorts of social, moral and

spiritual matters – and usually their own opinions are shaped and formed, not at all by the Lord, but by the world.

*And **then**, they pride themselves on their own intellect... And they present an intellectual argument against God... With their fancy words, they present what **they** believe is a convincing argument. They appeal to worldly wisdom (science; philosophy; sociology). They use distorted worldly ethics, and appeal to emotion...*

Now the thing is, they believe they're doing the right thing. They are so deceived, they believe they're doing God a service... But because they elevate themselves **above** God, and depend on their own intellect to present and defend their own opinion (which they place above God's revealed Word), they're actually building a stronghold for Satan. And where are they doing it? In the church...

Now, that's the most obvious example I can think of. Some of us are perplexed:

- why are there churches who are willing to marry same-sex couples?
- Why are there churches, where Christian men and women live together before they're married, and the church doesn't seem to find anything wrong with that;
- Why are there churches, where the message is "God wants you to be rich"; God wants to prosper you. He wants to make you successful.
- Why are there churches who preach hate and racism?
- Why are there churches who will never teach about sin, and our need to repent of sin?

How could it come to this? How could their Gospel be so different to the Gospel the apostles taught in the Bible?

arguments and ... lofty opinion(s) raised against the knowledge of God

For many people, the old, old, beautiful message of the Gospel, isn't enough... They're looking for something new. They're looking for something that appeals to their worldly nature; and some people just get excited about "I know something that you don't know"...

And in our world of social media and web content, all sorts of crazy teaching is confronting folk, and getting 'shared'; and 'liked'; and 'tweeted' and 're-tweeted'... And it becomes accepted, when it's simply rubbish...

If any of us have any doubts about people's willingness to be led astray and to believe a lie, surely the current pandemic, and the false information on social media, that gets shared; and liked; and passed along – surely that should remove all doubt about how easy it is to be led astray, and to believe a lie...

And even in the church, it spreads like that... A belief/view/opinion/teaching – a lofty opinion of one person, spreads throughout the churches of the world...

And Paul says:

⁵ We destroy (these) arguments... **⁵ We destroy** ...
every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of
God

How's he doing it? He appeals to the truth... Remember your
spiritual armour:

- truth
- righteousness
- readiness of the Gospel
- faith
- salvation
- word of God

If we stick to these things. If we stick to :

- truth
- righteousness
- readiness of the Gospel
- faith
- salvation
- word of God

All of those lofty opinions and arguments – they just don't
stack up. They get destroyed....

I reckon God must have a bit of a laugh at times...

Going back to the example of the so-called “progressive
Christianity”, the argument they make (which many believe),
is:

“We need to change what we believe, so that we can appeal to a younger generation. We can’t expect this next generation to believe all this spiritual mumbo-jumbo...”

And you know what??? The churches that have adopted the opinions and the arguments of progressive Christianity, are becoming the fastest declining, and the oldest congregations in the nation”... They are literally dying out.

On the flip-side of that:

Do you know what sorts of churches are growing quickly? Do you know what sorts of churches, young people (and I’m including well educated young people) – do you know what sorts of churches **these** people are turning to???

It’s churches who preach from the word of God. It’s churches who proclaim the old, old Gospel (that has been loved by generations of disciples of Jesus)... It’s churches who have strong leaders, who will use spiritual weapons, to expose false teaching, as they speak the word of God... That’s the sort of churches that are growing... Isn’t that wonderful!!!

So the first stage of the campaign, to bring the church back on track, was **destruction**. – the destruction of the false teaching – counteract it with the truth – use the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God).

The next stage of the campaign, was **capture**. He says, “we ... take every thought **captive** to obey Christ”

The Greek word (thought) there is νόημα (noēma). It means “thought; mind;”. It’s to do with our intellect; reason...

You know, some people think that when you become a Christian, you give up all thought and reason – you lose your mind – it’s like you have a partial lobotomy – you become brainless... They believe that faith is the enemy of thought. Not at all...

Some of the most brilliant people I know, are disciples of Jesus Christ. Some of the deepest thinkers (men and women with profound understanding), are disciples of Jesus.

The Lord wants us to love Him with our minds.... Jesus said:
Matthew 22:37 ... “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

When we become disciples of Jesus, we don’t lose our mind – we **surrender** our mind... We surrender our mind, to become captive to Christ...

In a war, when an army is defending a military asset like a port or a bridge, or an airport, if the enemy’s getting the upper hand, and it’s beginning to look like the advancing army is going to overtake them,,, they lay charges, so that they can destroy the facility as they flee... Because if that asset falls into the hands of the approaching army, then that army can use it against them...

When we give ourselves over to Christ, God doesn't want us to lose our minds... He wants us to surrender our minds to Him... Our intellect, and our ability to reason and argue – He doesn't want us to lose that ability... He wants to capture that ability, and to use that for **His** purposes.

Has God given to you, the ability to logically state a case, and reason, and argue??? Well, surrender that ability to God.

And:

- state the case for Christ;
- reason for Christ;
- argue for the Gospel...

Through Spiritual weapons, Paul says we **take every thought captive to obey Christ**,

Don't be influenced by false teaching. Use your mind, to argue against it... The aim? **to obey Christ**.

Alright, so:

- Destruction of prideful opinion / arguments of false teaching;
- Captivity of our thoughts/minds/intellect for Christ;
- Thirdly, Punishment...

V⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Is there a place for punishment in the church??? Yep. There must be discipline. If someone continues to teach a false

Gospel – If the message that's being presented, **isn't** the Word of God, but simply worldly opinion, that **cannot** be allowed to continue in the church – it's a fortress of Satan...

Now, V6, refers to 2 different groups in the Corinthian church. **It has to. ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.**

I think the best way to see this, is the punishment, is for the disobedience of the unrepentant false teachers... But until the Corinthians were won over, any action against the false teachers would not have been effective. A church, has to **want** to honour Christ.

And so, discipline in a church, only makes sense, when our minds are surrendered to Christ...

And what does the discipline look like? Well, there's no place for false teaching in the church. So, if the false apostles refused to repent, ultimately they'd be put out of the church...

For some churches, this would be a pretty tough message. There might be somebody listening to this today, and you realise that a stronghold of Satan, is being allowed to establish in your church – lofty opinions & arguments and reasoning, that is actually taking people away from God... And you might've noticed it happening, but you didn't realise how serious it is...

Don't let it continue. Do not allow a stronghold of Satan, continue in your church. We're in a spiritual battle...

Destruction; Captivity; Punishment...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

It's with sadness, that we see strongholds of Satan taking hold in the Christian church, today.

And when we see no Godly leader who will stand against it...

Lord, we ask that you would help us to be vigilant – to destroy the strongholds of Satan, with Your word of truth; and the power of Your Spirit.

Lord, capture our minds –
We surrender them to you.

We give you our thought.

We give you our intellect.

Help us to love you with our whole minds.

And if You ever find our intellect drawing us away from You,
Capture us, O Lord.

And Lord, give us strength

And give us resolve,

to never allow a stronghold of Satan in church.

And to put it out, because although it masquerades as good,
it is against You.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.