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Captivating Our Thinking

by Dan Trygg

"The weapons of our fight are not fleshly (i.e., merely human), rather they are able with God for the purpose of a tearing-down of fortified constructions, (we) tearing-down reasonings and every proud thought raising itself up against the experiential-knowledge of the God, and (we) captivating (lit., taking at the point of a spear) every thought (or, opinion) toward the hearing-under-obedience of the Anointed-King, also (we) having readiness to bring-justice-out-from every hearing-aside-disobedience (or, hearing-amiss-disobedience), whenever the hearing-under-obedience of y'all might be fulfilled" II Cor. 10:4-6

"Be self-controlled, be watchful. The adversary of y'all, the devil (the one given to malicious gossip), as a roaring lion walks about seeking someone to gulp down." I Pet. 5:8

In Romans 12:2, the apostle Paul tells us that **spiritual transformation occurs in conjunction with the renewal of our minds, including both our perceptions of reality and our thought processes.** This would be a large enough task in itself, ...attempting to learn truth, and replacing erroneous thoughts with more accurate ones..., if we were permitted to sort this out on our own. The truth is, however, that it is not just "God and me". **There are many other sources of information that impinge on our conscious and unconscious minds every day.** Not only do I have to deal with *my* faulty roadmap of reality, I am constantly receiving input from family members, co-workers, friends, and media sources that either tend to reinforce old errors, or will direct me down other alleyways that will *lead me away* from where God wants me to go. In addition to the established habits and static of my own mind, and all of the stimulation of the human world, there is yet another source of input that must be recognized and treated with the seriousness it deserves. **There are spiritual beings seeking to influence, infiltrate and program our thought processes and world view, so that they can manipulate us to their evil purposes.**

In Ephesians 6:10-20, **the apostle Paul** reminds us that indeed *our primary warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual beings* who manipulate people, and the world system, to promote their agenda. They can, and *do*, oppose us personally, ...attempting to harass, entangle, entice, entrap, and deceive us any way that they can..., in order to render us ineffective, to stall out our spiritual development, or to destroy our lives. He commands us to put on the armor of God, so that we will not fall prey to their attacks. II Corinthians 10:4-6 is another context where he mentions this warfare. Written from Ephesus just a short number of months before the Ephesian letter, it reveals again the consciousness that Paul had about this spiritual warfare factor in our lives. *He described the enemy as being "dug in", having built up strongholds of thought, which we must tear down.* In another epistle, written some eight to ten years later, **the apostle Peter** also gives us a glimpse of the very real danger of the enemy's unending desire to destroy us. *We need to be vigilant* in order to avoid being captured as the quarry of his hunt. Some of Peter's language (I Pet. 5:8,9) reminds the reader of the words of **James, the Lord's brother** (4:7,8), occurring only a few pages earlier in our Bibles, but actually written some eighteen years before, "Submit therefore to God. *Resist the devil* and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." **The testimony of these three significant figures of first century Christianity, the apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle to the Jews, and the most visible leader of the Jerusalem church, all agree. We must be wary of the schemes and wiles of spiritual beings who are set against us, and would attack us.** In the almost twenty-year span of their writings, these church leaders put pen to parchment to draw attention to this very real danger to spiritual growth, because *they saw this as a very real threat.* Would we not do well to examine this area a little more closely?

Without getting all "spooked out" about all this talk of spiritual warfare (the enemy would love it if we would panic, and start "running scared"), let us take a closer look at this subject. **What practical things can we glean from these passages? What can we do to defend ourselves? Are there some typical or specific telltale signs of this kind of warfare in a body of believers?** What can we be on the look-out for? I find it interesting to note that both James and Peter quote from Proverbs 3:34, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." **Arrogance and independence are specific attitudes warned against.** In James, the people had been enamored with wealth, and lusted after it. This unhealthy focus had caused them to not only foster an uppity attitude of favoritism. This specially honored the rich and dishonored the unfortunate (2:1-12), and became a specific cause of quarrels and conflicts in their midst (4:1,2). If they would submit to God in genuine repentance, and draw near to Him as their treasure, then they would be able to resist (stand against) the devil successfully (4:7-10). In follow-up, he revisits these themes, warning them against speaking against one another, ...of becoming boastful and arrogant, ...of living luxuriously when others need our help, ...and of complaining against one another (he specifically mentions

the reality of suffering, and the need for patience and endurance in that specific context). Instead, **we ought to humbly receive one another, confess our faults to one another, and pray for one another.**

I Peter 5 also exhorts us to humbly cooperate with our elders, and to "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (5:7). **We are to patiently humble ourselves under God's hand, so that He might promote us in due time.** Give to Him the cares and worries of *your* heart, because He has your well-being in *His* heart. He will not forget you. Then comes the warning concerning the devil. We are to be aware that he is ever on the prowl. We can resist him, firm in our faith, recognizing that the "brotherhood" (our spiritual family throughout the world) are completing "the same things of the sufferings" as we are. ***We are not alone, nor ought we to think that our plight is so much worse than everyone else's. Others are enduring similar trials. "Woe is me" can easily turn into the other side of pride, thinking that I am special because of what I have endured, ...and then looking down on others who seem to have it easier.***

In II Cor. 10:1, Paul obviously changes the subject from what had gone before in the letter. It is interesting, however, to read through the remaining chapters. **What is the major issue that he is dealing with? Again, it is spiritual pride.** In this scenario, he has been attacked and discredited by false apostles, people who came in his absence with letters of commendation and credentials (3:1; 10:12), boasted of their spiritual pedigree and their accomplishments (11:18,22), picked away at Paul's apparent weaknesses (e.g., 10:10), and then asserted arrogant, abusive leadership over them (11:20). **The common themes of independence, arrogance, speaking against others, and self-importance at the expense of others are evident.** (Interesting to note that "devil" means "slanderer, one given to malicious gossip", an activity these false apostles had been doing, and a theme common to *all* of these passages.) It is interesting that Paul introduces his defense and counter-attack with the verses commonly understood as being about spiritual warfare. It *is* about this subject, but, without seeing the context, we may easily fall into the practice of using "Christian spells and incantations", instead of seeing where the real attack has its *focus*, ...and standing against *that* with a clear understanding and sound, practical means.

What am I saying? I am saying that, **although these three leaders of the first century church could see spiritual opposition as a real threat, none of them promoted any means other than to expose the lies, ...to call for a change of mind and heart..., and to stand firm in the truth. Since the devil has no true, legal authority over any of us in Christ (Col. 2:14,14; Lk. 10:19,20), virtually any influence he may attempt to put upon us comes by guile, deception and bluff. He gets authority over us to the degree that we choose to go along with His suggestions. Once his scheme is exposed, it is to be rejected and resisted.**

Let us take a closer look at the passage from II Cor. 10. Note that Paul says that the weapons he employs are not fleshly, or strictly human. They are *spiritual*. They are powerful in and/or with God. It is important to note several important points: **(1.) There are weapons.** Paul does not specifically tell us what they are, but he tells us what they are for. In Eph. 6, the only aggressive things we can employ, in the list described there, are the sword of the Spirit (the *rhēma*-word of God), and prayer (vss. 17,18). **(2.) The weapons are only functional with God's involvement.** The story of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19 is instructive on this point. They used the same weapon that they had seen Paul use, but it backfired on them, because they did not have God as their partner to back up what they were doing. (A brief comment on the significance of the "rhēma-word". This refers to a specific spoken directive from God to us, something He is telling us to do in a given situation. This is in contrast to the common understanding of the sword of the Spirit being the Bible. That is *not* what Paul is indicating by his choice of the Greek word *rhēma*. Although God may tell you to invoke or claim a truth from the scripture as one possible course of action, He may also ask you to do a great variety of other things, as well. The concept of the *rhēma*-word demands God's involvement, as well as our hearing-under-obedience.) **(3.) The weapons are directed against fortified constructions of thought.** Paul describes them as reasonings, or arguments, and every arrogant thought raised up against the experiential knowledge of God. The picture of a fortification implies something prepared over an extended period of time, built brick-by-brick, something which will not easily be breached and removed. It is also something that allows an enemy to hide and to resist direct assault. **(4.) We must wield the weapons.** They will not operate without human involvement. **(5.) We are to lead every thought or perception to the hearing-under obedience of Christ.** This implies not only relationship with Jesus, but developing a hearing-heart to discern what He is saying to us. Every thought must pass muster with Him. Every one. The language clearly supports dealing with them one-by-one. **(6.) We must make right every instance where we chose to divert ourselves away from His direction, or where we heard-wrongly.** There is accountability and responsibility for our stubbornness, or lack of skill. *God wants us to change, and grow. Repairing our past errors is part of a learning process to more firmly establish our character and to teach us to walk in truth.*