



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Not Your Average War

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In what amounts to an extended heading for 2 Corinthians 10–13, Paul begins the defense of his ministry (see our previous summary, [here](#)) with an appeal, grounded on “the meekness and gentleness of Christ,” in which he begs the Corinthians to not make him show his boldness in person. That is his initial response to the charge some had made based on their suspicion that he was “walking according to the flesh” (10.1–2). Then, using that idea as a springboard, he turns to the real issue, defining the nature of the work in which he was engaged.

In the Greek text, verses 3–6 consist of a single sentence. While they are helpful for enhancing the readability of the verses, English translations somewhat obscure Paul’s thematic emphasis. The ESV, for example, divides verses 3–6 into three sentences, rendering the three participles in verses 3–5 as English indicatives (vv. 3, 5) or an infinitive (v. 4). But the Greek text makes clear that Paul did not write three independent statements in verses 3–6 (or five, as in the NIV); rather, he declared one main idea, the specifics of which he explained with four verbal modifiers. A more precise translation reads as follows (the main verb is in bold, participles are italicized, and other verbs are underlined):

For in the flesh *walking*, not according to the flesh **are we waging war**, for the weapons of our warfare not fleshly but powerful to God to the destruction of strongholds, *destroying* arguments and every lofty opinion *being raised* against the knowledge of God, and *taking captive* every thought unto the obedience of Christ, *being ready to punish* [infinitive] every disobedience when your obedience should be made complete [subjunctive].

My intent is not to criticize the English translations, but to highlight Paul’s main idea. In the protracted sentence comprising verses 3–6, the only indicative verb, “the mood of assertion” (Wallace 1996, 448), is the present plural middle form στρατευόμεθα (*strateuometha*) in verse 3. Bauer gives two meanings for the word: “1. do military service, *serve in the army*; 2. to engage in a conflict, *wage battle, fight* fig.” (Bauer 2000, 947). That is Paul’s main idea, underscored by his use of the cognate noun στρατείας (*strateias*), “warfare,” in verse 4. Paul saw his ministry as warfare. But what kind of a war? The participles he used in verses 3–6, all of which, like the indicative “waging war,” are in the present tense, explain.

First, it is not a war fought “according to the flesh” (v. 3). That does not mean it has no connection to or impact on material priorities and concerns; we are, after all, “walking [περιπατοῦντες, *peripatountes*] in the flesh.” But the battle we are fighting is cosmic, or, to use the word Paul has already used in his correspondence with the Corinthians, “spiritual” (πνευματικός, *pneumatikos*) (cf. 1 Cor 2.13, 15; 3.1; 9.11; 10.3; 12.1; 14.1, 37; 15.44, 46). Thus, Paul says, it is

a war which must be engaged with weapons that are “mighty before God” (ASV; δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ, *dynata tō theō*), that is, the kind of weapons through which “God can work powerfully” (Martin 1985, 305).

In positive terms, we fight by going on the offensive to engage in the war of ideas. Following its cognate noun with a participle at the end of verse 4 (Greek text), Paul says that the powerful weapons of God bring about the “destruction of strongholds” (καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων; *kathairesin schyrōmatōn*) by destroying arguments (λογισμοὺς καθαιροῦντες; *logismous kathairountes*). As used here, *logismos* refers to “the product of a cognitive process, calculation, reasoning, reflection, thought” (Bauer 2000, 598).

Paul knew that he had to be aware of, counter, and seek to defeat the thought systems at the root of the world’s philosophies and practices, the ideas that were “being raised against [ἐπαίρομενον, *epairomenon*] the knowledge of God” (v. 5). He says that his mission entailed an offensive effort that was committed to “taking captive” (αἰχμαλωτίζοντες, *aichmalōtizontes*) every thought that is opposed to God with the goal of convincing people to acquiesce to the obedience of Christ (v. 6).

As we reflect on the implications of Paul’s statement, we are reminded, first, that people act the way they do because they think the way they do. Whether good or evil, outlooks and behaviors do not occur in a vacuum. People espouse philosophies, or worldviews, that are calculated to lead to defined behavioral outcomes. While we can denounce and take action to curb or limit the damage of the worst of these behaviors, in the nature of the case, those actions can address only the symptoms, not the root causes. As Jesus emphasized, the attitudes that lead to sexual immorality, theft, murder, and other destructive behaviors come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mark 7.21–23). Thus, as Paul elaborates elsewhere, we will effectively counter those ideas and their behavioral consequences only if we persuade people to change their root thinking to “learn Christ” and adopt his mind (Eph 4.20; Phil 2.5; for prior discussions of these texts and Paul’s emphasis on the mind, see for example [issue 5/3](#) and [issue 6/12](#)).

Second, 2 Corinthians 10.1–6 reminds us that we must be neither reactive nor passive in engaging the war of ideas. Peter told his readers to be “ready always” (ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ, *etoimoi aei*) “to make a defense” of the hope we embrace (1 Pet 3.15), a commission that entails being proactive to equip one another for the challenges we will face from people who are quite active in their advocacy of opposing ideas.

Works Cited

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From the Sermons-Class Notes, Topical page ([here](#)), “A Case for a Christian Apology” — The lecture notes for part one of a two-part presentation I was invited to teach on the need for Christian Evidences (notes link [here](#))

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