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Associated Bible Students
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CARNAL WEAPONS vs. CHRISTIAN WEAPONS

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Preceding Brother Sundbom's talk the friends joined in singing Hymn No. 266.
Opening prayer by Brother Woodworth.

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"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—2 Cor. 10:4, 5.

Fighting is not always done to kill or capture. Overcoming any kind of resistance is fighting. Competing business houses are said to "fight" each other. Some people fight certain tendencies in their nature, such as quick temper, etc. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame." (Rev. 3:21.) All true Christians must fight and overcome, even as Jesus did.

Our text shows that Christian weapons overcome high things, exalted "against the knowledge of God." It pictures the "knowledge of God" as the aggressor, the attack being carried forward by the followers of Christ.

During the Gospel age this knowledge captures only those few whom the Father draws, but in the next age it will conquer mankind so universally that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14.) The mind is the battleground in the warfare. The wily adversary quickly recognized this, and therefore has blinded the minds of humanity.—2 Corinthians 4:4.

The "high things" which exalt themselves against godly knowledge are called "fortresses," in the *Diaglott* translation. These enemy fortresses are various errors—unbelief, fear, pride, envy, etc. These are also called "imaginations" or "reasonings" (see marginal references.) For example, pride is the result of a person's reasoning—imagining that he is better than some one else. Since this is erroneous reasoning, "imagination" is not a bad translation. All of the enemy fortresses are vain imaginations of some kind, not factual reasoning. The apostle is not condemning all reasonings, only those which become fortresses of error and oppose the knowledge of God.

Knowing God Means Eternal Life

Knowing God means much more than "believing that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." This much is required before we can even come to Him. (Heb. 11:6.) Knowledge of God comes only as a result of making earnest endeavors to do His will. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar."—1 John 2:4.

Really knowing God will mean eternal life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee." (John 17:3) We can see, then, that our knowledge of God must increase from the time we first hear of Him, until our full obedience to His will has resulted in eternal life. This means also, as our text shows, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

It is the work of all of God's people to wage this warfare. Jesus began by demolishing the fortresses of error in the minds of His disciples, and in as many others as possible. "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."—John 18:37.

The twelve apostles then took up the work and helped, others to a knowledge of God; and these helped carry on the work in behalf of others. This has continued down through the Gospel age. It is still the work of all who try sincerely to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He spent His Life this way. The Apostle Paul was an outstanding example in this respect—2 Cor. 5:18-20.

Doing What We Can

Some conduct this warfare from the public platform, others in a more personal way. Some are especially successful in reaching those who have so little knowledge of God at all, while others are more useful in helping those who have started to a further knowledge. All who have the Master's spirit will surely endeavor to do all they can in this their life work. They begin it now in this age, but will continue it in a broader scope in the Millennial age, until all shall know Him, "from the least unto the greatest."

Only the right kind of weapons will bring us success in this warfare. Any means used in endeavoring to overcome a resistance is a weapon. We are advised to "overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:21.) Doing good is here shown to be a Christian weapon. "Carnal" simply means **fleshly**. At present all flesh has been polluted with evil and selfishness, and is therefore displeasing to God.

Carnal weapons are those which the adversary has taught the human family to use. Among them are flattery, deceit, exaggeration, sarcasm, fear, things which appeal to a person's pride or selfishness. On the other hand, Christian weapons are those which God has taught His people to use—the truth and the spirit of the truth. These are the only ones we are commissioned to use.

In the dark ages the literal sword, dungeon and other physical weapons of fear were used in an effort to make people worship. Being carnal, they failed to help anyone to a knowledge of God. The main Christian weapon is the "sword of the spirit which is the Word of God." This does not mean that we can take words or phrases out of the Bible at random and use them as we please. It is the teaching of the whole Bible, the truth, that is to be our weapon. For instance, "everlasting fire" and "everlasting punishment" are Scriptural words; but they have been misused to drive people away from God instead of drawing them to Him, as the truth would do.

Use of Good Judgment

Jesus tells us that we should be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The Apostle Paul used different Scriptural arguments when talking with the Greeks than when talking with Jews. We, of course, would approach a nominal church member differently from one who does not profess any religion. We should carry the principle further and give some thought to each person's views and predilections. By using truths that appeal to a person's reasoning he may be so convinced as to be "fully persuaded in his own mind." This is an especially desirable condition.

In a letter to a Seventh Day Adventist, Brother Barton exemplified this wisdom. He did not ridicule or even directly contradict their views on keeping the seventh day. Instead he showed that keeping the seventh day was good, but keeping all days to the Lord was much better. This method is far more likely to bring the desired results than

if we antagonize a person's prejudice.

We are told to speak "the truth in love." (Eph. 4:15.) The motive behind our efforts should be only to help others to a knowledge of God and to receive the same blessings we enjoy. This is exemplifying the same kind of love that God has for the world (John 3:16)—manifesting a desire that they might be saved from their blindness and eventually receive eternal life.

If we are careful to always have this pure motive it will greatly reduce the danger of appearing proud of our knowledge of the Scriptures, and also counteract giving the impression that we have something to gain personally by trying to convince others. The harvest work in Brother Russell's time was especially successful because the real desire of most of the friends was to help others to know God. Later the main object with many became mere bookselling, and we are familiar with the un-Christian results.

Wisdom Rightly Applied

Our text says that these weapons "are mighty through God." Without Him we can do nothing. It is God's spirit that does His work, operating through any person He sees fit to use. We should seek therefore to be always filled with the holy spirit—through prayer and sincere study of His Word and will. Then our work for Him will be much more effective.

Now let us see how these principles can be used in helping others. One of the most prominent of the fortresses that opposes the knowledge of God is sin; and it must be recognized by the person whom we wish to help, before he can readily accept Jesus. We might bluntly say, "You're a sinner," which of course would be true—but very unwise.

He would probably think of a sinner as being an immoral or especially evil person; then he would reason that he is as good as many church members, and would dismiss the matter lightly. On the other hand, if we showed that from the Scriptural standpoint "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and explain to him the divine plan how different it would seem to him. If he was honest and interested at all he could see what sin has wrought, and would be prepared to understand how Jesus could become a "ransom for all."

Various errors, tenaciously held, are enemy fortresses which obstruct the spread of the truth. We should be "wise as serpents" and "speak the truth in love" as we endeavor to demolish these fortresses. Brother John Edgar, in his booklet, "Where are the Dead?" told about his own experience while learning the truth. Before he came to understand it some of the friends had asked him, "Is the soul immortal?" He replied, "Of course it is." They then asked him **why** he believed this, and he could only answer, "Because nearly everybody believes it." The friends then showed him that this was not a reasonable answer and also explained that it was not Scriptural. They did not antagonize his prejudices, but helped him to reason the matter out for himself, and in the end to be fully persuaded in his own mind. Incidentally, by simply asking questions, as these friends did, tends to give an exhibition of humility which is highly desirable, since it is the Lord's spirit.

It is our duty and privilege to help to a deeper knowledge of God those who already have some knowledge of Him, and to show them the reasonableness of consecration. We may show them that it is the beginning of a new life, of knowing God in a way that will result in eternal life.

Growing up into Christ

Immediately after consecration a person is called a “babe in Christ,” and the Apostle Peter says that babes should “desire the sincere (unadulterated) milk of the Word,” that they may grow thereby. This will help them demolish fortresses of error and unbelief, thus leading them to a deeper knowledge of God. We who endeavor to help them should make sure that none of our own unproven ideas are brought in to adulterate the milk of truth.

For example: Shortly before 1914 many of the friends told others that it was wrong for Christians to marry.

This was their own private idea, not Scriptural, and therefore it had to be unlearned later. If however we help them to know God through His Word, then when trials come and they find that the brethren have faults, they will be able to stand, because they know Him and trust Him alone.

The work does not end with being babes in Christ, but continues as we grow up, and even until death. More and more enemy fortresses must be destroyed, by bringing in more and more of the knowledge of God into our hearts and minds. Then there are new fortresses of error which may arise after consecration—such as pride of knowledge, envy of other brethren, discouragement, deceitfulness of riches, cares of this life, etc. We should be on the alert to prevent the rise of these, as they are very difficult to demolish later. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

It is for this reason that we are advised to “take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:12, 13.) This work is not for the elders alone, for the text says, “exhort one another.” All the members of the body of Christ are or should be engaged in helping each other to a deeper knowledge of God.

The subtlety by which these fortresses arise is shown by the words, “**deceitfulness** of sin.” This should be counteracted by **daily** (continually) exhorting one another on holy things. What is our conversation usually about? About things that help us to know God better, or worldly topics? If it is about the latter, we are not only wasting our time but neglecting a most important part of the very work to which we are called. Therefore we should not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another daily, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” —Heb. 10:25.

This last phrase calls our attention to the fact that the need for daily exhorting each other is especially great in our time. In harmony with Daniel’s prophecy, knowledge has been increased not only on general subjects but especially in religious truth. The Lord Himself has come forth and served us most bountifully.

Subtleties of Satan

The great adversary, however, opposes this increase of truth, and appears as an angel of light in his efforts to continue his deceptions. He suggests all sorts of new ideas and theories which are set forth as advanced light, and which on the surface may seem better than the truth which God gave us. Already these are serious errors.

The serpent in the Garden of Eden seemingly offered something better to Eve than what God had given, but it resulted in the sentence of death. Likewise some who have taken up with these new things which they supposed were an improvement over the

Harvest Message, have gone back into the nominal systems or else lost all interest in religion.

So, while we have God's truth as our shield and buckler, the adversary is attacking it from every side; and many are falling victims to his deceptions. We should therefore exhort one another daily with the truths of God's Word and thus help prevent fortresses of error arising in the minds of one another, knowing that each of these hinders the knowledge of God.

We should also remember that many of our brethren are still in bondage. The fortresses of error, sectarianism, fear, are so strong that we can do very little to help them while in this condition. Some of these are still God's people, and in His own time and way He can demolish these fortresses—probably by drastic means. After this is done it may be our privilege to receive them and help them to go ahead to learn more about God.

If we have kept His spirit and continue to speak the truth in love, some of them will say, "You have always shown the spirit of the Lord, and we would like to come to your meetings." One who disagreed on almost every point of doctrine said to another, "You certainly show the spirit of Christ, brother." This is a language which all can understand. Whatever others do, let us be sure to seek to be filled more and more with this spirit, that we might be truly helpful to others.

At times we are apt to get impatient and feel that love is not a very powerful weapon. Brother Russell once suggested, in a Manna comment that we should never take up our adversary's weapons even for a moment, because this would be admitting that they are better than ours. Love will ultimately conquer the whole earth. During the Gospel age it has conquered those whom the Lord has called and chosen. The Apostle Paul said, "The love of Christ constraineth us."

As we look at His life can we doubt the power of love? Whenever there is a tendency to use sarcasm, exaggeration, flattery and other carnal weapons, let us remember that these will not accomplish God's work at all, but by using them we would be serving the adversary. Only by speaking the truth, and speaking it in love, can we serve God.

Our text tells us that Paul used Christian weapons to help others. But what about demolishing the enemy fortresses in **ourselves**? We are told, in 1 Peter 4:1, to arm ourselves with the same mind that Jesus had. We should seek to follow in His steps in all things, having His mind and disposition. His life was spent in giving Himself for others, and we should seek to do the same thing. If we do this, the fortresses will be demolished in ourselves by the principle that "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

To be able to use the truth of God's Word as a weapon in helping others, we too must study to know what the truth is. As we do this, we demolish the fortresses of error in ourselves. In endeavoring to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" and to "speak the truth in love," we will be cultivating loving consideration for others. This follows just as surely as reaping follows sowing. This method of learning by **doing** is most effective. "Expression deepens impression."

Let us never forget that our chief mission in life is to help others to know God. While the greatest results of our effort will be manifest only during the next age, when all the ends of the earth shall turn to God, yet we should do what we can now. This was the course of Jesus while on earth, and those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" must do likewise.