

## **Witness & War**

### **Introduction:**

Three important questions to consider:

1. What is the spiritual condition of the people to whom we go with the Good News?
2. How does God work to effect change in their hopeless condition?
3. What can we do to overcome Satan's evil influences in the minds & hearts of our hearers in order to bring them closer to knowing God?

### **A. THE HOPELESS SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF OUR HEARERS**

Read the following Scriptures and write down the key words & thoughts Paul uses to describe the spiritual condition of people outside of God's kingdom:

- ◆ 2 Cor.4:3-4
- ◆ Eph.2:1-3, 12; 4:17-19
- ◆ Col.1:21
- ◆ 2 Thess.1:8

Outwardly the people we will meet and speak to are mostly very polite, friendly, nice pagans, hospitable, intelligent, very sincere in their beliefs and totally convinced that these beliefs are true.

But God says that they are spiritually dead, disobedient to God, blinded by their pride and by the spirit of this age, hardened, ignorant of the Way, without hope, without God, slaves to their own lusts and passions.

If this is their real condition, then how can they be changed? How can life come to a corpse? How can the blind be made to see? Understanding biblical answers to these questions will help us as we work together with God to help rescue people from the kingdom of darkness and make them captives for Christ.

### **B. THE POWER THAT CAN DO THE IMPOSSIBLE**

Man's spiritual condition apart from a true faith in Christ is unquestionably hopeless – no matter how sincere they may be in their own beliefs. However, we have experienced a power that can do the impossible – that gives sight to the spiritually blind, gives life to the spiritually dead, melts hardened hearts. This is the power of the Gospel.

Read the following Scriptures and note the key words and expressions about the Gospel message:

- ◆ Rom.1:16,17
- ◆ 1 Cor.1:18; 2:1-5

- ◆ 1 Thess.1:4-5

Key words: weakness, foolishness, the Spirit and power, the Spirit and conviction.

Questions:

- ◆ Are YOU a true believer of this message of hope (Good News)?
- ◆ Has this Gospel message transformed YOUR life?
- ◆ Are you personally convinced that this message alone, though sounding foolish to the mind of man, is the power of God that is like a mighty weapon against all of Satan's lies and deceits?

### **C. GOING OUT TO TAKE CAPTIVES FOR CHRIST**

Read 2 Cor.10:1-5.

Context:

- ◆ Opposition from inside the church: Paul faced opponents to the Gospel who were sowing lies among the churches. See also 2 Cor.11:13-14.
- ◆ Opposition from outside the church: From among his own countrymen (Jews) and from others everywhere he went.

### **FUNDAMENTAL INSIGHTS FOR TAKING CAPTIVES FOR CHRIST:**

1) Recognise that taking the Gospel out into Satan's territory means engaging the enemy in a very real and tough WAR. See verse 3. He wasn't just arguing against people with different opinions or beliefs, but rather he was fighting against the father of lies, the great deceiver. He had set up strongholds in the lives of people and nations.

Some observations to consider:

- ◆ SUFFERINGS were an inescapable part of the apostles' fight for the souls of men. Paul reminds us by his own experience that those who enter into this spiritual conflict find it hard-going. People can receive wounds and scars for life. See 2 Cor.4:7-12; 11:23-28; 12:9-10; Gal.6:17 "... for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." The battle for the souls of men and women must never be thought of as a "picnic", a pleasant activity devoid of struggle, heartache and suffering.
- ◆ This war was not just the occasional skirmish, nor one that is over and finished in a day or two. Rather it is often AN ONGOING CONFLICT until the enemy gives up his captive. Note that people did not suddenly fall at Paul's feet when he proclaimed the truth to them. For months he fought and wrestled for the souls of men – through prayer and the faithful preaching and teaching of the truth, faithfully and carefully explaining the Good News and debating ("dialoging") to those who would come to listen. See Acts 19:8.

- ◆ Wielding the Sword of the Spirit effectively does not guarantee that everyone who hears our message will obey the Gospel. That's our struggle. We so easily blame ourselves or someone/something else when our hearers remain hardened. Or we easily give up on this person or family instead of pressing on in hope for a breakthrough. Let us not think of ourselves as "successful" in the spiritual war only when we see visible or immediate results. Our part is to shine the light of the knowledge of the Gospel upon the mind and conscience of the unbeliever. God has promised to work through our witness to destroy the lies of the enemy. But not all will be convinced and believe. Don't be discouraged in the fight as God has many to bring to Himself through our witness. See also Acts 18:9-10.

2) Believe firmly in the POWER of the WEAPONS our Commander-in-chief has given to us. See verses 4-5. "Weapons" = "armour" or "instruments of warfare".

The weapons with divine power that Paul wielded in the fight to take captives for Christ were:

- ◆ Proclaiming the truths of the Gospel – teaching, explaining, discussing & debating (or "dialoging" in order to persuade – Acts 19:8), see also See Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12; Rev.1:16.; and
- ◆ Praying aggressively for the spreading of the Gospel. See 2 Thess.3:1-3. (See separate notes.)

These weapons were so powerful that by using them effectively, Paul could destroy or demolish "fortresses / strongholds" set up in the minds of men and take them captive for Christ.

This meant in reality = engaging in the fight by exposing the "arguments" and the "high or lofty thoughts" of his opponents (who rejected the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ – see 2 Cor.4:6) to the truths of the Gospel.

Sadly our non-Christian friends are often convinced by high-sounding, lofty arguments against the true knowledge of God in Christ, using human logic or what in their minds is "superior" teaching. These arguments are nothing other than "fortresses" or "strongholds" that keep them in bondage to the lies of the evil one and to the vain "imagination" of their hearts.

What is it that can deliver them from these strongholds? Only the Good News of Christ.

This Good News is simple, yet profound – simple enough for children to receive, but too deep for the mind of man to grasp. It is foolish to the mind of man who will believe if he can understand the mysteries of God in Christ, yet divinely powerful for the rescuing of people from their spiritual graves.

Therefore, beware of the danger to use the same human or carnal methods used by people from other faiths in the hope we can then win them for Christ. Any other method is weak, with little effectual power to rescue people from Satan's kingdom of darkness and bring them into God's glorious kingdom. Only the Gospel is that power – going out through the power of God's Holy Spirit.

It is possible and good to use a variety of methods to bring the Good News to non-Christians. However, no matter what method we may use (skits, dramas, films, literature et al), it is absolutely imperative that we remain faithful to our calling to speak clearly about Christ and His Cross. This message of the Good News of the Kingdom – about Jesus the King, the Victor over the kingdom of darkness and all the spiritual forces of that kingdom – is still as powerful and relevant today as it was in Paul's day.

#### Questions:

- ◆ Are you truly convinced of the great, divine power of the weapon of God's truth to take captives for Christ?
- ◆ Are you also convinced that through the mystery of prayer, God works to change hearts and convince people of the truth?
- ◆ Are you convinced and unashamed of the Gospel? If you are struggling with doubt, ask God to renew this conviction as preparation for your involvement in the fight. Then use this weapon and watch what God can do.

3) Enter the FIGHT with the attitude and heart of a warrior. Fight as Christ fought, also Paul. See verse 1-5.

- ◆ With meekness, humility and gentleness, not with a superior or arrogant attitude that led him to trust in his great intellect or his skills to convince people of the truth. See verse 1.
- ◆ With the toughness and courage of a warrior. Notice the language of a fighter that Paul uses in verse 5.
- ◆ With a heart set on victory, not defeat. Put off the mindset of a "loser" or a "wimp", fearful of what the enemy would do to him. Put on the mindset of a victor.
- ◆ With a clear awareness of your authority as one commissioned by Christ Himself to fight for the honour of His name. Christ commissioned Paul, enduing him with this authority to proclaim the Good News in His name. He knew where his authority came from, and so went out – not as just an ordinary human being but "under orders", to whom God had given His authority to act. With this authority, Paul answered the arguments of his opponents, realising that he was speaking on the behalf of Christ. See also Matt.28:18; Luke 10:17-20; 1 Samuel 17:34-37, 45-47.
- ◆ With courage to use our powerful weapons for the sake of winning people for Christ, rather than just talking about these Gospel truths with other Christians.

#### Conclusion:

Remember that our battle is Christ's, not just ours. When we know it is Christ's war and that we are fighting behind Him and through Him, then we are released from any anxiety about the possibility of failure.

Therefore, go out asking God the Father (over and over again) for the gift of His Spirit to strengthen and equip you with His power, His wisdom, His Word, His discernment, His love for the sinner – receiving all these gifts with thanksgiving. See Luke 11:9-13.

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[See other references about our God-given weapons for the fight: Rom.13:12-14 (Christ); Eph.6:14-18 (inward convictions and faith – focused on the righteousness of Christ, and outward actions of engagement in the conflict – using the sword of the Spirit against the lies of Satan, praying aggressively with the help of the Spirit); 1 Thess.5:8 (faith and love).]

Keep fighting, assured that through Christ He will give to us CAPTIVES that we can present to Christ as “offerings”. See verse 5; Rom.15:15-17.

Paul’s use of the weapons referred to the power of the weapons he used reveals that they were effectual in overcoming the arguments and lofty thoughts and ideas of his hearers. As we can read in Acts, many people turned from darkness to light through the teaching and preaching of Paul. Paul knew that he himself was the greatest proof of the Gospel’s life-changing power. See 1 Tim.1:12-17.

Witnessing for Christ is engaging in a real war, with a real enemy, directed towards taking captives for Christ.

Therefore, we are called to fight, to pray aggressively, to enter the battle with the strong desire and intent to take captives for Christ, refusing to allow the enemy to defeat us through discouragement.

And when the enemy is overcome through our work, give thanks to God for what HE has done. Never lose sight of the truth that we are but His servants, His mouthpieces. Beware of spiritual pride that will render us increasingly ineffective in God’s servants and rob God of the glory that is due to His name.

Failure to grasp this important dimension of witnessing to the Gospel will inevitably result in:

- ◆ Discouragement because we ourselves become the brunt of the enemy's attacks on us.
- ◆ Ineffectiveness in our attempts to help explain the Gospel to unbelievers.

What is our primary weapon?

Answer: God's TRUTH, especially the truth of the "Gospel" concerning the Person & Work of Jesus Christ (see Rom.1:16 CEV "It (the Good News) is God's powerful way of saving all people who have faith....").

Study Eph.6:14-17 and note how each part of our spiritual armor is linked with the Person & Work of Christ. Compare: Rom.13:14.

Therefore ...

- Keep a clear focus upon the PERSON & WORK OF JESUS
- Be on your guard against Satan's tricks and traps = to side-track us, to get us entangled in pointless arguments about unimportant issues, or to set a trap for us through the arguments or objections of our hearers – even by using God's Word –note Satan's attempt to use God's truth in the temptation of Jesus: Matt.4:6.
- Don't trust in your superior arguments or clever answers to change the hearts of your hearers – only the Gospel of Jesus has divine power to pull down the strongholds of their "arguments" and false beliefs concerning "the knowledge of God" – see 2 Cor.10:4-5.

How does God work through His weapon of truth?

Satan has craftily planted his destructive lies in the minds of unbelievers (also in the minds of believers!). The sincere follower of another faith is convinced in what he/she believes. And they may have their own logical arguments to support their beliefs.

But as the Christian soldier wields the weapon of God's truth, God works to demolish the strongholds in the minds of the unbeliever. See 2 Cor.10:5; Heb.4:12-13.

God's Spirit works in the spirit of the unbeliever using His weapon of truth (focused upon Jesus) to bring "light" and "sight" to the spiritually blind – see also Psalm 119:105,130. Compare: John 9:25.

How are we to fight and take captives for Christ?

- Skillfully: we need to study the doctrines of Christ, to know what we believe and be convinced of what we believe – so that we can communicate the truth

clearly and convincingly / persuasively, with that deep conviction of the Spirit  
– see Acts 19:8; Col.4:3-4; 2 Tim.2:15

- Carefully: not “thrusting” with the Sword of the Spirit in any and all directions, speaking hastily whatever comes into our minds – rather waiting upon God’s Spirit to give us His discernment and wisdom concerning the appropriate response “in the Spirit” for each person’s questions or arguments – see 1 Cor.2:9-13
- Respectfully: not proudly making fun of the arguments or beliefs of others, using down-putting words to show how foolish they are to believe such lies – rather respectfully sharing God’s truth offering or “holding out the word of God” – see Phil.2:14-16a; 1 Peter 3:15
- Prayerfully: asking God to work powerfully in the heart of the person to whom we are sharing God’s truth, believing in His power to use His Word of truth to slowly break through all the lies and resistance in their minds & hearts – see 2 Thess.3:1-2; Rom.15:30-32; Eph.6:18-20 – from these references, it is very evident that the battle for the souls of men & women is generally not won in a day but only through great persistence, perseverance and faithfulness both in prayer and in proclamation / teaching.  
N.B. See separate sheet entitled “Guidelines: The Role of Prayer in Witness and Warfare”