

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

### *“God's Battle Plan”*

**February 8, 2015**

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 10:3-12

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Cor 2

### **Introduction-**

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!-- (2) I beg of you that when I am present I may not

have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. (3) For though we walk in the flesh, 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. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

This week I was speaking with a Christian lady whose husband is evil and who has had numerous adulterous relationships over the years – currently pursuing another one. She told me about the terrible and unbiblical advice a pastor's wife tried to enslave her with one time when she asked for help from the church. After I responded with a kind of rhetorical question: “What world do people like her live in?” she gave this insightful reply-

“They live in an un-reality based on who *they* want God to be instead of based on who He is.”

In other words, well, what do you call that? When human beings embrace as God a creation of their own making? You know the answer – *idolatry*. And when a professing Christian church is actually serving an idol, trouble of all kinds brews and breaks out.

So it was at Corinth. By now you know the setting. False teachers had come into the church and were working to alienate the people from Paul and Christ’s truth. They embraced the *world’s evaluation of greatness*, employing methods and teachings that the world regarded as true power. They lived in an un-reality based upon who THEY wanted God to be, and they were spreading their poison. This is why Jesus called this kind of thing, *leaven* – because it spreads and infects so rapidly.

2 Corinthians 11:19-21 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! (20) For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. (21) To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else

dares to boast of--I am speaking as a fool--I also dare to boast of that.

Do you see how God’s power is required then to renew our minds?

1 Corinthians 2:13-14 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (14) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Paul did not serve Christ “according to the flesh.” That is, according to the logic and “wisdom” of this world, of the natural man. Remember –

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) that your faith might

not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

the power of Christ may rest upon me.

What kind of weapons and warfare are we used to as human beings living in this fallen world? Flesh and blood weapons. Physical weapons. Guns, armies, missiles, and bombs. In other words, in man's natural thinking, power is to be found in man's *doings* and his *makings* and his *efforts*. But you can see the clearest expression of God's power in Christ at the cross. The Son of God came into this world, became one of us, humbled himself to the point of death on a cross, and through weakness, effected victory over our enemy. Paul had learned this and he really opened this epistle by speaking of it and he is going to reiterate it very plainly when we arrive at chapter 12 -

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that

### **Beware of Willful Blindness**

You will recall that last time I read an account to you about the early days of X-rays and how they caused child leukemia. The book is Willful Blindness and really is an excellent description of how our minds cling to what the Bible calls *the wisdom of the world* or fleshly wisdom. Human beings do not want to leave their comfort zone. So they turn a willful blindness to anything that contradicts it. Let me give you a few more illustrations from this book and then we will see if we can connect what Paul has to say in verses 3-6:

"As human beings, we are highly driven to find and to protect the relationships that make us feel good about ourselves and that make us feel safe. That's why we marry people like us, live in neighborhoods full of people like us, and work with people like us....

....even the most educated and rational can be amazed by how little impact rational

understanding makes *when love is involved*. “I remember my mother calling me up and explaining about the pains she was having in her arm and her stomach that had lasted about twenty minutes,” Andrew Dick told me one evening. Dick is a highly experienced, level-headed physician not known for pulling his punches. Like many doctors, he loves the intellectual puzzle of diagnosis and isn’t easily second-guessed. “And she said to me perhaps it was something she ate. And I said, instantly, yes, it must have been something you ate. And I put the phone down.”

As he tells this story, Dick’s wife, Lindsey, looks on, bemused. She is also a doctor, but it isn’t her parents we’re talking about. “So I hung up the phone and told Lindsey about the conversation and she looks at me and says, ‘No, it isn’t what she ate. She’s having a heart attack.’ And of course she was right! So I was straight back on the phone to her.” Dick tells his story with wry amusement that he could

have got something so simple so wrong.

But of course that is why physicians aren’t supposed to treat family members—because love blinds them to the realities of the case. This doesn’t, unfortunately, stop family members from asking for advice and even, on occasion, free care. And it has proved impossible for professional organizations to prevent doctors treating their own families. The dangers are twofold: a tendency either to underplay the problem (I love you and can’t bear for you to be ill) or to overplay the problem (I couldn’t bear to lose you so will treat the tiniest symptom). Every doctor I’ve met has experienced one of those responses; they know they can’t do a proper diagnosis and they also know that that isn’t a reflection of their clinical expertise.

Our identity depends critically on the people we love, and a central function of family life is to preserve our positive

illusions about one another.  
That is what families are for....

Tales of marital blindness are legion, the stuff of high drama and low comedy alike. From Othello to Pierre Bezukhov to Mad Men's Betty Draper, we can identify with characters who won't see the truth because they let us explore our deepest fears, that we might be wrong about each other or wrong about ourselves. We laugh with relief because it isn't us, and we weep because it so easily could be....

In 1938, the residents of Mauthausen, Austria, were feeling optimistic. Their stone quarry was once again being worked, as massive rebuilding in Germany and Austria brought new business to the town. In nearby Linz, Austria, Hitler had great plans for his hometown: a new bridge, town hall, art museum, party headquarters, and two monuments, one commemorating the Anschluss and one commemorating the composer Anton Bruckner.

The town's economy was looking up, too, because the building of a new concentration camp created jobs and new business for suppliers and craftsmen. When prisoners began to arrive in August of that year, the SS tried to keep the population at a distance. But the camp was in full view, and ordinary life had to continue. Inevitably that meant that the brutal treatment of prisoners was witnessed by many bystanders. One was a farmer, Eleanore Gusenbauer, who didn't like what she saw. So she wrote to complain:

"In the Concentration Camp Mauthausen at the work site in Vienna Ditch inmates are being shot repeatedly; those badly struck live for yet some time, and so remain lying next to the dead for hours and even half a day long. My property lies upon an elevation next to the Vienna Ditch and one is often an unwilling witness to such outrages. I am anyway sickly and such a sight makes such a demand on my nerves that in the long run I cannot bear this.

I request that it be arranged that such inhuman deeds be discontinued, or else be done where one does not have to see it.”

Heffernan, Margaret (2011-03-01). *Willful Blindness*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Kindle Edition.

All of this is to drive home the point that threatened the church at Corinth and which threatens us today – *willful blindness to the truth, willful blindness to the true wisdom and character of God, and stubbornly embracing the old ways, the old thinking that this fallen world embraces as wisdom*. You can see then, as we noted last time, that nothing less than a powerful, divine re-creation of our hearts and minds and beings is required if we are to break out of enslavement to the darkness of the spiritual blindness of sin:

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (13) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

## God's Way of Warfare

Alright then, listen as Paul explains God's power and warfare:

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 For though we walk in the flesh, 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. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Paul was a human being with a flesh and blood body. “*For though we walk in the flesh..*”. He wasn't an angel. He was a man. But when it came to his divinely-appointed mission, it was not his own human strength or reasoning that he used.

Notice that the imagery Paul uses here is *warfare*:

- Waging war
- The weapons of our warfare
- Divine power to destroy
- Strongholds

First then, we need to acknowledge the obvious – *if you are a Christian, then*

*you are in a war.* And this is still another truth that our earthly flesh wants to be willfully blind about. We want to believe we are at peace. We want to think that our souls are not in danger. You see the thing in physical, earthly terms – and I suspect also in the spiritual realm too – in regard to this whole issue about Islam and terrorism. Why is it that in spite of all the horrible, sadistic evils continually perpetrated by terrorists, and those terrorists are consistently Muslims, why is it that so many people doggedly cling to the mis-notion that Islam is a religion of “peace.” It is willful blindness. The implications are not pleasant-

- All religions are not true
- There is a war to be fought, and we must be soldiers in that war
- There is a real threat
- *We have been wrong about many things*
- Our President, charge with protecting us, is wrong and even dangerous to us

Christian, if you are a Christian, then God has made it plain to us in His word – you are in a war. There is an enemy far more potent than Islamic terrorists battling for something more important than your physical life – namely, your soul and the souls of those around you. There are, as you

know, many other Scriptures that make this plain –

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (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.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

And as we have been seeing these past few weeks both here in 2 Corinthians and in our Sunday School studies, *the enemy loves most of all to come at us in disguise-*

2 Peter 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth

will be blasphemed. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

It's a real war, a full-fledged one with enemy agents, propagandists, kingdom against kingdom.

So Christian, the first thing is to get this down – you are in a war. You have a Commander-in-Chief who calls you to battle. And, as we are about to see, you have been provided with the weapons with which to fight, AND you must be very careful to use THOSE weapons and not any of your own making.

### **Our Targets**

The nature of our enemy and the nature of the enemy targets we set out to destroy, determine the nature of our weapons. And as Paul has told us in Ephesians, our enemy and his tactics are not flesh and blood. Therefore, we cannot war against him with flesh and blood methods and weapons.

Look at what he says here:

- Strongholds
- Arguments

- Lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God
- Taking POW's – every thought captive to obey Christ

The battle then is IN man – in the mind, in the affections of the heart and soul. Satan is a liar and a deceiver. He assaults our minds. He establishes forts or strongholds, spiritual bunkers you might say, in people and the Christian is called to assault those bunkers. Only we don't lob a grenade inside – not a real one at least. No, our weapons are:

- Divinely powerful (in contrast to human power)
- Arguments and opinions which we raise up against the arguments and opinions of the enemy

That is to say, our weapons are the divinely-empowered pronouncements of God's truth. And is that not exactly what we have here in the Bible? Think, for example of the OT Prophets, of Jesus, of the Apostles. What did they do? They brought light into darkness. How? By announcing and proclaiming God's Truth. Truth about God. Truth about man. Truth about the enemy, about sin, about the gospel, about eternity and about how we all got here in the first place. Truth.



Truth that is DIVINELY powerful. Divinely. That means God's power, not ours. We cannot blow apart these enemy strongholds anymore than the Israelites could have broken down the walls of Jericho. But their weapons, which God told them to use – the marching around the city, the blowing of the trumpets and all – were divinely empowered and the walls did in fact come tumbling down. So it is today.

Yes, we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised up against the knowledge of God...and we take captive men's minds in this way – which really means they are set free. But it has to be done with God's truth, empowered by His power.

Muslims are forbidden to enter a Christian church. Hussein Wario was raised up in Kenya as a Sunni Muslim in a very, very strict Muslim family. He went to a muslim school and became a *muadhin* (the one who calls Muslims to prayer several times each day). He tells us, in his book *Cracks in the Crescent*, that one Christmas while he was away at a boarding school, he was invited to a Christmas Eve program at a local church. His mind began to race because while he did not want to stay in his room at his host's house alone (because of internal battles and wars going on and the threat of being kidnapped by enemy

Somali fighters), his religion forbade him from entering a church. He says –

“Muslims in Kenya widely believe that if people go into a church and sit in the pews, they get a stamp on their buttocks, which earmarks them for hell. Muslims believe Christians will go to hell because Christians ascribe partners to Allah by believing in the Trinity, the most grievous sin by the Koran's standards.

The potential of being kidnapped was part of the reason that I chose to go to a Christian church that evening. I thought that since Allah was fully aware of my predicament, he would understand on the Judgment Day.

With jitters I walked into the church. That was my first time to set foot in a Christian church. The songs were in Swahili and pokomo, my host's tribal language. Young people from the church recited Bible verses from memory. These verses included the creation story in the book of Genesis, prophecies about the coming of Jesus in the prophets, and his virgin birth in the gospel of Luke. The last song of the program was about how Jesus Christ came to earth to save his people from their sins. No sooner did the program end than I hurried out of the church with my mind preoccupied with thoughts about the stamp.

I was quite remorseful about going into a Christian church. Thus I went to bed right away. I lay in bed that night but could not sleep. Whenever I tried to sleep I heard church songs. From that day on, my typical night was filled with lack of sleep. Almost every time I closed my eyes to sleep, I revisited the church scene. The songs continued to haunt me and my nights were never the same.

The strange dreams continued for some time despite my coming home from school. Before long, the holiday break was over, and I left again for school. By the time I reported to school, I had an interest in Christianity. I yearned to learn about Isa ("Jesus" in Arabic). I thought it was unfair to not read his gospel that Islam teaches was given by him. Muslims believe that Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad were prophets who were each given a holy book.

The Methodist church adjacent to my school had choir practice on Saturdays in preparation for Easter. The church was located between my school and the Indian Ocean. Since I was afraid to go in, I listened to the choir from my dormitory. The breeze from the ocean made it easier for me. The songs were about the passion of Jesus Christ.

Cecilia, a Christian girl in my class, had a Gideon International New Testament Bible. I thought it was fair enough to find out what the Bible taught about Jesus Christ but was hesitant. I plucked up some courage to borrow it. It was in English. I thought it was written from right to left like the Koran, so I opened the back of the Bible, expecting it to be the front. At that time I came across John 3:16 which was inside the back cover. That was the first Bible verse I had ever seen in print, and it caught my eyes right away. I perused through the pages trying to locate in what context it was written.

On Easter 1989, I went to a solitary place to hang out. On that day I went there solely to contemplate about Jesus and how he gave up his life for me. I was still a Muslim who was praying five times a day and observing the Ramadhan, but my mind was constantly on Jesus. It seemed outlandish that I had thoughts about his passion. Muslims do not believe in the original sin; they believe that human beings are born without sin, rejecting the notion that one human being can take on the burden of the sins of another. They believe that Jesus is a mere human being. I continued contemplating about him that evening. Within minutes I was crying. I spent

the whole evening alone, thinking. Afterward, I went back to my dormitory. For fear of rephension, I did not share my experience with anyone.”

Well his story goes on to tell how he came to Christ, lived for a time as a secret Christian, and was eventually persecuted.

How do you explain all this? Think for instance in light of the examples we have heard about Willful Blindness? Here is this system, this Jesus – all of which is an earth-shaking threat to this young Muslim’s comfort zone. Our brains are so fallen that they automatically lead us to not even *see or hear* anything that opposes our world. Yet Hussein could not not keep seeing and hearing Jesus.

Well, the answer is exactly what Paul is talking about here – “*The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*” He is talking about God’s Word, about the gospel. It’s the same thing he says back in Romans –

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is

revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Look, this should be convicting but it should also be very encouraging to us. God can take a children’s choir singing about Christ, down the street from a Muslim boarding school, divinely empower it so that those words and music become the power of God and blow apart the antichrist stronghold is a Muslim boy’s mind. This is convicting because of our bent to use fleshly, worldly methods to “build the church.” But it is also very encouraging because this means that the efforts we make that seem so feeble and it seems so often like we aren’t doing enough, are more than enough when God chooses to effect His power through them.

- Give a pamphlet or book to someone
- Worship the Lord on the Lord’s Day, getting in your car and headed to church
- Prayer
- Invite someone to church with you

Those are things we CAN do. And you can think of others. But what we CANNOT do is create that divine power that blows up those strongholds that keep a person blind or hostile to

Christ. That is why the power Paul speaks of is called “divine power.”

Finally, and in some ways this is Paul’s point he making to the Corinthians – Christ’s people using Christ’s weaponry and Christ’s methods, *do not look powerful and impressive in accordance with the world’s notions of power and impressiveness.*

2 Corinthians 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."

Paul in fact REJECTS any method that is designed to frighten them (see vs 9) as these bullies were doing who had come in among them. He will oppose the wicked with God’s power if they don’t repent, but he doesn’t walk around just chafing for a chance to blast someone.

Finally, I think it is good for us to be encouraged by Paul’s words here as we consider ourselves and this church. We are few in number. We have few resources. We are located at the edge of the world in a little-known place where there really are not many people. But you see, what the Lord chooses to do through us is not at all reliant upon our numbers or resources or location. In fact, as He has shown us

in Scripture, in the history of His people, God always chooses to use the weakest, the lowliest, the fewest – for His glory.