

**07/05/26 Winning the Spiritual War
2 Corinthians 10:1–6**

Welcome...

We have the blessing of studying the book of 2 Corinthians. After two chapters (2 Corinthians chapters 8-9) on financial giving, Paul now begins a new section on winning the spiritual war.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6...

Every Christian is engaged in a spiritual war. It is not primarily political, cultural, or military, but spiritual. Every day we battle temptation, lies, fear, false teaching, and sinful desires. Many Christians try to fight these battles with worldly methods, but Paul reminds us that God's battles are won God's way.

Although this passage addresses Paul's defense of his apostolic ministry, the principles extend to every believer because every Christian is engaged in a spiritual battle against Satan, sin, and every lie that opposes the knowledge of God.

If we are going to win the spiritual war, we must understand four biblical realities.

Main Point: 2 Corinthians 10:1–6 presents four realities of spiritual warfare that enable believers to fight with divine power for Christ's glory.

- I. The Character of Spiritual Warfare (10:1–2)**
- II. The Power for Spiritual Warfare (10:3–4)**
- III. The Battlefield of Spiritual Warfare (10:5)**
- IV. The Goal of Spiritual Warfare (10:6)**

My prayer is we not trust in human wisdom, persuasive words, political power, or worldly strategies to accomplish the Lord's work. Instead, we humbly depend on the Holy Spirit and faithfully use the sword of the Spirit, that we persevere in prayer, trust the power of the gospel to transform hearts.

I. The Character of Spiritual Warfare (10:1–2)

Look at how verse 1 begins, "Now." I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."

As the word "now" indicates, this passage begins a new section of 2 Corinthians, and he begins with a warfare analogy.

As we heard Jeff read from Ephesians 6, Paul often described the Christian life as warfare, and here he develops that picture more fully.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 10–13, Paul begins to defend his apostolic ministry against false teachers who questioned his authority. Paul's opponents had criticized him for being weak. They claimed he was timid when present but bold only in his letters. So, Paul is being sarcastic when he writes in verse 1 "I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!"

Paul's opponents measured leadership by worldly standards—commanding presence, impressive speech, and displays of power.

Paul answers by explaining how true spiritual warfare is fought. He begins in an unexpected way. If you were introducing a section about warfare, you might expect words like courage, strength, weapons, or victory.

Instead, notice in verse 1 Paul begins with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. That immediately tells us something important: Spiritual warfare is unlike every other kind of warfare.

Instead of defending himself with arrogance, Paul points to Christ and begins with the meekness of Christ. Meekness does not mean weakness. Biblically, meekness is strength under control. It is the humility that refuses retaliation even when one possesses the power to strike back.

Gentleness refers to graciousness and fairness. It describes someone who does not insist on every personal right but responds with patience and mercy.

No one embodied these qualities more perfectly than Jesus Christ. He possessed all authority in heaven and on earth, yet He welcomed little children. He could calm storms with a word, yet He washed His disciples' feet. In 1 Peter 2:21–23 when Jesus was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He was persecuted, He did not retaliate but kept entrusting Himself to His Father.

Yet Christ's gentleness never meant passivity. The same Jesus who welcomed children also cleansed the temple. The same Savior who stood silent before Pilate will one day return as the conquering King of kings.

Christ's power was always perfectly governed by His character. That is the pattern Paul follows. He would rather appeal than command. He would rather restore than discipline. But if the Corinthians refused to repent, Paul was fully prepared to exercise the authority Christ had given him.

Gentleness is never the absence of courage. It is courage restrained by love. This teaches us an important principle. The first weapon in spiritual warfare is not force—it is Christlike character.

Before Paul speaks about divine weapons, he reminds us that those weapons must be used by people who resemble Christ. Too often Christians fight spiritual battles using worldly methods. We become angry instead of gracious. Anxious instead of patient. Proud instead of humble. We complain instead of giving thanks.

We think winning means shouting louder, arguing better, or overpowering our opponents. But the kingdom of God is never advanced by sinful methods. As James 1:20 reminds us, "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

God cares not only about what we fight for, but how we fight. Imagine a skilled surgeon holding a scalpel. The instrument is incredibly sharp, but it is guided by steady hands motivated by compassion. In the wrong hands, the same instrument becomes destructive.

The Word of God is called "the sword of the Spirit." If we wield that sword without Christlike humility, we wound people rather than helping them.

Whether you are discipling your children... Counseling a struggling believer... Defending the gospel... Or confronting false teaching...

We are to engage in spiritual war like Jesus. Because truth without love becomes cruelty. Love without truth becomes compromise. Christ perfectly embodied both truth and love.

Christlike character is essential. But character alone is not enough. If we are going to win the spiritual war, we also need divine power. Paul turns next from the character of the warrior to the power behind the warfare.

II. The Power for Spiritual Warfare (10:3–4)

Look at verse 3 with me, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.”

Paul now moves from the character of spiritual warfare to the power for spiritual warfare.

To “walk in the flesh” means that he possesses no supernatural powers but is a frail clay vessel that is wasting away and will eventually die. Paul concedes he walks in the flesh, which means that he lives in a real human body with real human weakness.

But “to wage war according to the flesh” means that one relies on flimsy human resources that are void of any divine power. Paul’s methods are not fleshly, worldly methods. He does not rely on manipulation, intimidation, or deception to ensure that he will win.

His power is God’s power, which means that he fights according to God’s rules of engagement. He has an arsenal of powerful, divine weapons at his disposal.

Paul says in verse 4, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”

The Christian life is a war, but it is not fought with the weapons of the world. God has given His people divine weapons. The Word of God. Prayer. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Faith. Righteousness. Truth. The power of the Holy Spirit.

These may look weak to the world, but they are mighty before God.

Think about how God has always won His battles.

Gideon did not defeat Midian because he had a massive army. God reduced his army to three hundred men so everyone would know the victory belonged to the Lord.

David did not defeat Goliath because he was stronger, bigger, or better armed. He came in the name of the Lord.

God delights to win His battles in ways that make His power unmistakable. That was Paul’s ministry.

His opponents judged him by appearance. They wanted a powerful personality, impressive speech, and visible strength. But Paul understood that true spiritual power does not come from human impressiveness. True spiritual power comes from God. That is why weakness in the hands of God is stronger than strength without God. As Paul writes in 12:9, God has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Paul says at the end of verse 4 of our text that these divine weapons are powerful for “the destruction of fortresses.” A fortress was a stronghold, a place of defense, a place where people retreated for safety during attack. Spiritually, these fortresses are systems of thought that resist the truth of God.

False religion is a fortress.

Pride is a fortress.

Self-righteousness is a fortress.
Materialism is a fortress.
Bitterness can become a fortress.
Fear can become a fortress.
Lust can become a fortress.
Unbelief can become a fortress.

These strongholds cannot be destroyed by human effort alone.
You cannot argue someone into the kingdom by cleverness alone.
You cannot harass someone into holiness.
You cannot shame someone into true repentance.
You cannot conquer your own sin merely by willpower.

Only God's truth, empowered by God's Spirit, can bring down spiritual strongholds.

If you look down at the bottom of our parking lot you will see a pile of large chunks of concrete that have been removed by heavy machinery. Imagine you are part of the construction crew here on our property trying to demolish and remove a reinforced concrete swale. But instead of heavy machinery you are trying to do it with a plastic toy hammer. You may be sincere. You may be energetic. You may swing with all your might. But the weapon is not sufficient for the battle.

That is what happens when we try to fight spiritual battles with fleshly weapons.

We may be emotional, persuasive, or determined, but if we are not relying on God's power, we are fighting with the wrong weapons.

Brothers and sisters, trust the power of God more than the wisdom of man. The question is not whether God has supplied what we need. He has. The question is whether we are using the weapons He has given.

When you are battling habitual sin, do not merely say, "I need to try harder." Say, "Lord, I need to depend more deeply on You." Do not merely roll up your sleeves, get on your knees and pray.

When you are trying to help someone who is trapped in unbelief, do not rely on pressure or manipulation. Use the Word of God.
Pray for the Spirit to open blind eyes.
Speak the gospel to them with patience and confidence.

When you are discouraged by your own weakness, remember this: weakness does not disqualify you from spiritual usefulness.
Paul walked in the flesh.
He knew weakness.
But he fought with divine power.
And divine power is sufficient to destroy every fortress raised against God.

So, Paul has shown us the character of spiritual warfare and the power for spiritual warfare. But where is this battle actually fought?

Verse 5 tells us that the battlefield is the mind and heart.

III. The Battlefield of Spiritual Warfare (10:5)

Paul now identifies where spiritual warfare takes place. Verse 5 says, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

The battlefield is the mind. Spiritual warfare is a battle for truth. Satan has always attacked the truth of God. In the garden he asked Eve, “Indeed, has God said?” His strategy has not changed.

He still attacks the Word of God. He still questions the goodness of God. He still twists the truth of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says Satan (“the god of this world”) blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the glory of Christ in the gospel.

In 11:3 Paul candidly says...

Satan continues to seek to mislead and deceive people, and Paul is prepared to fight a pitched battle to liberate them.

In verse 5, Paul identifies three targets in this battle.

The first target to destroy false arguments. In verse 5 Paul says, “We are destroying speculations.” These are human reasonings, arguments, opinions, and philosophies that set themselves against God’s truth.

Not every idea is neutral. Some ideas are spiritual strongholds. For example, the idea that man is basically good is a stronghold. I was sharing the gospel with a man this week and when I asked him why he should spend eternity in heaven and not in hell, his response was “I think I am good enough to get to heaven.” I told him “None of us are good enough. Romans 3:23 says we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. That is why God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to save us. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.” We need to destroy the speculation that man is good, good enough to get to heaven.

The idea that salvation can be earned by good works is a stronghold. The idea that truth is whatever you want it to be is another stronghold. The idea that happiness is found in money, pleasure, success, or self-expression is a stronghold.

These lies must be confronted with the truth of God’s Word.

Second, we destroy proud obstacles. Paul says we are destroying “every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.”

This is the language of arrogance. Sinful man does not merely misunderstand God. Man exalts himself against God. He lifts up his own reason above God’s revelation. He lifts up his own desires above God’s commands. He lifts up his own righteousness above God’s gospel.

This is why spiritual warfare is not merely intellectual. It is moral and spiritual. The problem is not only that people believe wrong things. The problem is that the sinful heart resists the knowledge of God. Romans 1:18 says man “suppresses the truth in unrighteousness”

Paul knew this from personal experience. Before Christ saved him, Paul lived inside a religious fortress of self-righteousness. He trusted his heritage, his law-keeping, his zeal, and his religious achievement.

In Philippians 3:4–6 he described the stronghold in which his confidence had rested. Before Christ saved him, Paul trusted his heritage, religious achievements, zeal, and law-keeping. Galatians 1:13 says Paul in religious zeal “used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”

But on the Damascus Road, the risen Christ shattered that fortress and brought Paul captive to the Lord. That is what grace does. Grace destroys the lies that enslave us and brings us under the loving lordship of Jesus Christ.

So, the first target in the spiritual battle is to destroy false arguments, the second is to destroy proud obstacles. Third, we capture every thought to the obedience of Christ. Paul says at the end of verse 5, “We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

That is a military image. A victorious army takes enemy soldiers captive and brings them under authority. In the same way, the end of verse 5 says every thought must be brought under the authority of Christ.

Not some thoughts. Not only religious thoughts. Not only Sunday thoughts. Not only the unbeliever’s thoughts and arguments.

But our own thoughts about God. Our thoughts about ourselves. Our thoughts about suffering. Our thoughts about money.

Our thoughts about marriage. Our thoughts about sexuality. Our thoughts about success. Our thoughts about the church. Our thoughts about the future.

Could anything be more wonderful than to have every thought experience captive obedience to Christ? Could we wish anything better for others? Could anything be more beautiful?

Ed Welch says, “the key to the battle is that we humble ourselves before the Lord and believe what He says not what our heart tells us.”

The problem is we listen to ourselves too much rather than listen to what God says in His Word. Paul Tripp writes, “No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do.”

We are not powerless and subject to our thoughts. By the Holy Spirit’s power, we can take them captive to the obedience of Christ. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

You think you are reading the Bible, but the Bible is reading you. It was only by the Spirit of God and the Word of God that we learn to take our sinful thoughts captive to Christ. All the patterns of wrong thinking, fearful and anxious thoughts, a preoccupation with self and introspective thoughts -including memories of the past need to be taken captive to Christ.

Every thought must bow before Jesus Christ. That means as Christians we cannot allow thoughts to wander freely through their minds without examination.

A few months ago, I realized something that surprised me. We’ve had the same tankless water heater in our home for about twenty-five years, and I had never descaled it.

Before I tried to tackle the job myself, I called the manufacturer and spoke with one of their engineers. The first question he asked was not, “How old is the unit?” He did not ask, “What model do you have?”

He simply asked, “Do you have a water softener?”
I said, “Yes.”

He explained that the water heater did not need to be descaled because every drop of water entering the water heater first passes through that water softener. That water softener removes the minerals that would otherwise build up inside the plumbing and eventually damage the water heater.

And this thought hit me, “That is exactly how the Christian mind is supposed to work.”
Just as every drop of water passes through a filter before entering the house, every thought should pass through the filter of God’s Word before it settles into our hearts.

Before we believe a wandering thought...
Before we dwell on a fear...
Before we nurse resentment...
Before we invite temptation into our hearts...
We should ask:
Is this true according to God’s Word?
Does this honor Christ?
Will this lead me toward obedience to Christ?

If the answer is no, that thought doesn’t belong in our hearts and minds and needs to be filtered out and replaced with the truth of God.

When anxiety comes, capture it and bring it to the promises of God. Philippians 4:6–7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ”

When lust appears, capture it and bring it to the holiness of Christ. “How can a young man keep his life pure? By living according to your word ... I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might now sin against You.” Psalm 119:9,11

When bitterness rises, capture it and bring it to the forgiveness of the cross. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:31-32

When pride grows, capture it and bring it to the humility of Christ. Philippians 2:3–8 says “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...”

When false doctrine appears, capture it and bring it to the truth of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction...”

Do not let sinful thoughts live rent-free in your mind. Do not let worldly ideas shape your heart unchallenged. Do not let lies build fortresses where Christ deserves a throne.

A prison guard does not allow dangerous prisoners to roam freely. They are kept under authority.

Likewise, if you are a Christian you must not allow rebellious thoughts to roam freely in your mind. Every thought must be arrested, examined, and brought under the authority of Christ.

This is why we must know the Word of God. You cannot fight lies if you do not know the truth. You cannot recognize error if you are not rooted in Scripture. You cannot take thoughts captive to Christ if you do not know the mind of Christ revealed in His Word.

So, fill your mind with Scripture. Meditate on truth. Memorize God's promises. Listen carefully to biblical preaching. Read with discernment. Pray for wisdom. Ask the Spirit of God to renew your mind.

Because the battlefield is the mind and victory comes as every thought is brought into obedience to Christ.

But Paul is not aiming merely for better thinking. The goal of spiritual warfare is complete obedience to Christ.

IV. The Goal of Spiritual Warfare (10:6)

“And we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”

Paul now brings the military imagery to its conclusion. A battle has been fought. The strongholds have been destroyed. The captives have been taken. Now the remaining rebellion must be dealt with.

In its immediate context, Paul is referring to the rebellious minority in Corinth. His desire is not to punish the church. His desire is to restore the church. He is waiting patiently for the majority of the Corinthians to respond to this letter in repentance and obedience. Once the church has taken its stand with the truth, Paul will confront those who continue to resist Christ's authority.

But Paul knows that church discipline is most effective when the entire church willingly participates. So he concludes verse 6 by saying, “we are ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”

Paul asks the Corinthians to separate themselves from his opponents and their fleshly version of Christianity. He hopes that the disassociation will bring some of them to repentance and protect the faithful majority of the Corinthians from their error.

The goal of spiritual warfare is obedience to Christ. God is not interested merely in winning arguments. He desires transformed lives.

Truth is never given simply to increase our knowledge. Truth is given to increase our obedience.

That is why Jesus ended the Great Commission by commanding His disciples to teach believers “to observe all that I commanded you.” Biblical knowledge that never produces obedience only hardens the heart. As James 1:22 reminds us, we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Parents understand this instinctively. When your child disobeys, your goal isn't simply to punish him.

Suppose your son lies to you. You don't think, “Oh, I can't wait to punish him.” You think, “I want my son to walk in truth, I want his heart back.”

The consequence isn't the goal. Restoration is the goal. You want your son to tell the truth because he trusts God and loves what is right. You want obedience that flows from love and trust.

That is exactly Paul's heart here. Paul isn't eager to punish the rebellious minority. He longs for repentance. Because God's goal has never been punishment for punishment's sake. God's goal is restored fellowship and joyful obedience.

This is also a reminder that spiritual warfare is both personal and corporate. Paul wanted the entire church to stand together in obedience before confronting the remaining rebels.

Healthy churches pursue holiness together. We encourage one another. Correct one another. Pray for one another. Bear one another's burdens. And together we submit to the authority of Christ. Obedience is the goal of spiritual warfare.

Every morning we wake up on a battlefield. Paul has shown us how to fight—with Christlike character, God's power, renewed minds, and joyful obedience. The greatest news is that Christ has already won the decisive victory. We do not fight for victory but from victory.

But this is only true for you if you have come to Christ on His terms. Have you repented of your sin and given your life to Christ?

The risen Christ now reigns over every power, every authority, and every enemy. One day every fortress of rebellion will fall. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Don't wait, do that now. Bow to Christ and take up his yoke and put on the whole armor of God. Take up the sword of the Spirit. Bring every thought captive to Christ. Fight in His strength.

And trust that the One who has already won the decisive victory will hold you fast and faithfully keep you until the day you stand victorious in His presence.

Let's pray...