



2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Spiritual Warfare: Tearing Down

Summary: There is a war beneath the war, and while the people who fight it don't seem outwardly impressive, they're following the pattern of Jesus.

Just before his crucifixion, there is a fascinating encounter between Jesus and Pontius Pilate (John 18:33-38). Pilate is the Governor of Israel, appointed by the Roman Empire, he is the ultimate source of power and authority in the region. His word is law. He has the authority to grant life or order execution.

Jewish leaders have brought Jesus to Him and charged Jesus with being a king – a rival to Caesar and Pilate asks – is this true? Are You a king?

Jesus says I am, but My kingdom is not of this world. If it was, My servants would fight for Me and I wouldn't be standing here in chains. He says, My kingdom is real, but it's not from here – I've come to announce it and everyone who hears and recognizes this truth comes to Me. Pilate responds by asking, "what is truth?" And then tries to hand Him back over to the Jews.

A few hours earlier (John 18:1-11), the disciples were with Jesus when He was arrested. One of them, Peter, had a sword which he pulled out and took a swing at someone, trying to save Jesus. But Jesus told Him to put it away. He then healed the man Peter had attacked and told him, if I wanted to, I could call for more than twelve legions of angels to save Me (Matt 26:53), but this is all happening for a purpose.

I say this is fascinating because in each case, Jesus is threatened with physical violence and He says, I could respond to that if I wanted to. I could meet it head on with force, with strength, with overwhelming firepower, shock and awe to use modern terms. And I would win. No question. No doubt. But I'm not here to go toe-to-toe with the military power of the Roman Empire, or get into a street brawl with a mob. I'm here fighting a different kind of war, with a different kind of weapons, and a different kind of tactics.

Jesus was fighting, if you want to think of it this way, the war beneath the war. His tactics did not seem impressive at the time. His weapons were invisible. He Himself was nothing much to look at, but He was actually fighting the most significant battle in human history, in the spiritual realm.

Today, Christians are called to follow His example. To fight against the powers of sin and darkness, just as Jesus fought, and to do so primarily with spiritual weapons and tactics. But here's the problem: when you fight the war beneath the war, it probably won't seem that impressive to other people. You might not look like you're doing much. Jesus was neither impressive or intimidating physically, but He was effective spiritually.

As we jump back into 2 Corinthians this morning, we find Paul addressing this issue. It turns out there were some in the early church who weren't impressed by Paul and thought they should be, if he was such a big deal.

We'll notice two things. First, we're going to talk about leadership: what kind of leaders should Christians be looking for? What kind of leaders should we try to be? And how does our answer line up with the example of Jesus? And then second, we'll look at the spiritual weapons and tactics we should use as we follow Christ.

Read with me and let's learn together from Scripture:

2 Corinthians 10:1 Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence *am* lowly among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you. 2 But I beg *you* that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

The rest of this letter is Paul's response to the question: Paul, if you're such a big deal, why don't you seem like it? Why don't you act like it? Why don't you impress us? This wasn't the attitude of everyone in Corinth, but it was the attitude of some.

You need to know Corinth was a happening city, like the LA, New York, or London of its day. It was a place where people were noticed, made a name for themselves, a place with celebrities. They were into flashy people and flashy things. They were trendy.

This is the city where people had their favorite pastor with people saying, 'I'm of Peter' while others said, 'he's alright, done some miracles for sure, but me, I'm of Apollos – amazing speaker that guy, seems like he knows everything!' Meanwhile others put on that super spiritual tone and said, 'Well, personally, I'm of Jesus.' You can read about it in 1 Corinthians where Paul calls them out and tells them how foolish their behavior is.

Well, apparently, there's a group still grumbling about Paul – they accused him of being what we would call a keyboard commando or internet troll, sitting in his mom's basement trying to change the world from his computer. 'He comes across so strong in his writing,' they said, 'but he's not really impressive in person.'

There was likely some truth to their criticism. Paul did not have the body of a Division 1 athlete or a Navy SEAL. One description passed down from the second century says he was "A man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked." In other words, he was average, or below average in appearance and build. His body had been broken by the things he's endured and he lives with chronic pain, what he calls a 'thorn in his flesh.'

He received a top-tier education growing up in the Ivy League of his day. But he described his first visit to Corinth this way:

1 Corinthians 2:3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. **4** And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom.

So, yeah, not much to get excited about if you're looking a charismatic leader or influencer. He's not the kind of person that would have impressed the average person on the streets of Corinth.

But here's the real question: is that what Christians, seeking to follow Jesus should have been looking for?

It's a question churches and Christians still need to be asking today. Because the truth is, just like the Corinthians, we're often drawn to the charismatic person, the good-looking, stylish, or strong pastor or worship leader. We're drawn to those who seem witty, or warm, or wise about what's going on. We're drawn to the person who seems to have the answers and is willing to speak out against the thing that bothers us most about the culture or politics or the world. We are all too often willing to follow the person who looks good and sounds good and makes us feel good. We're drawn to the person who would be impressive to the average man or woman who doesn't already know Jesus.

There is an Evangelical Industrial Complex in America that has produced a generation of celebrity pastors and musicians who look and sound impressive and gather large followings, but it seems like we've witnessed an unending parade of their implosions too as they fall to moral failure of one form or another.

And it happens, in part, because there is a large portion of the church who wants a pastor or ministry leader they can follow on Instagram, download their podcasts, read their books and tell their non-Christian friends about because he or she's so cool, so stylish or strong, so sharp or insightful, they know what's going on and we like what they say about it. And there's a whole Christian industry that makes money off of promoting it.

The question we need to ask, and keep asking, is: is this popular, powerful Christian we're all so proud of, still actually like Jesus?

Because, remember the problem back in Corinth - Paul is getting roasted for not being more impressive in person, but he says, actually, I'm just trying to be like the Christ I serve and Jesus was meek and gentle, not trendy, or flashy, or loud, or confrontational with all the Romans destroying this country and our way of life.

Right outside the back doors, on a sign behind the welcome table are the words of Jesus. **Matthew 11:28** Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And right after that, the very next thing Jesus said was:

Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus describes His heart, His personality, His style and He says, [I am gentle and lowly in heart](#). Friend, is that what you're looking for this morning? Are you looking for, hoping for, a gentle and lowly Jesus?

For some of you the answer is yes – you need to be reminded that the stories are true. He really is. And, if you come to Him, He will by no means cast you out. He said that. He meant it. The offer stands. You don't have to be cool enough to get close. You don't have to have your act together. You don't have to be in the know. You don't have to be impressive yourself. You can come, just as you are, and gentle and lowly Jesus really will receive you. And hopefully, so will a bunch of His followers, because we should.

But let's be honest, this is not what some Christians want from Jesus. Yes, that's true they would say, He's gentle and lowly, and a Good Shepherd and all of that, but He's also coming back on a white horse to rule and reign and conquer and set things straight and that's the Jesus I prefer to focus on. That's the Jesus I'm looking for. That's the Jesus I want to hear more about, the one I'd like to follow. Tell me more about Christus Victor. Christ the King.

And to you I would say, yes, you are right. Christ has conquered every sin and the power of Satan and He will return to judge the living and the dead and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Christ is King. He is coming back to clean house and there will be hell to pay.

He is both, the Lion and the Lamb. Not one or the other, but both. And if you lose one side you don't just have a downgraded Jesus, you have heresy.

So, perhaps it should not surprise us to hear that Paul is strong in his writing, standing boldly for truth like a lion, and simultaneously lowly, wishing to avoid unnecessary confrontation like a lamb. He's willing to say and do the hard things, but only if it's absolutely necessary. He hopes it won't be. He hopes those who oppose and question him will change their mind. And in order to affect that, he's going to war, spiritually speaking.

Watch as Paul describes how he fights like a lion while looking like a lamb.

[3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.](#)

Jesus and Paul were fighters, but they fought on a different level, using different weapons and tactics. They understood that the real battle in this life is not physical. It's not in the things you tend to notice and react to. There's a war beneath the war. The real battle is at the level of the heart and mind, it's at the level of ideas and values that propel the actions

we see and the things we hear, but we're so often distracted by the symptoms that we miss the disease. We're so caught up with appearance that we don't look for the substance.

The first thing I want to say here is that we need to recognize, there really is a battle, a spiritual war playing out all around us, and one which involves us. We live in the middle of this war whether we recognize it or not. There are things happening that you don't see behind, underneath, and inside the things and people you do see – it's the war beneath the war – and it's the reason why all the other stuff happens.

The second thing I want to say, is that we should not only be alert to the war, we should actively participate in it – fighting for ourselves, for those we love, and for the world. The goal is not to avoid fighting entirely, but to fight the right things, the right way, with the right weapons.

So, what are we fighting? Well, Scripture warns us that we have an enemy – Satan, who has fallen angels, known as demons, that are at work in this world whether you have an iPhone or not, whether we put someone back on the moon or not, whether AI takes over your job or not. Scripture is clear – the devil is just as real as God. We're told:

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith...

Eph 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Church, the devil is real, and we must resist him.

But he's not the only source of trouble. There are also several billion human beings on this planet, each as selfish as you and me. And that means some of them are going to do things, intentionally or ignorantly, directly or indirectly, that hurt us. Sometimes we need to be gracious with them, sometimes we need to speak up to them and speak out against them, and sometimes, we need to oppose them.

But there's also something else in this world, something even more dangerous, more insidious, more pervasive – I mean, the power of ideas, concepts, and values. The motivations and reasons *behind* the things people do. The reasons for the war beneath the war. Reasons that are sometimes suggested, highlighted, or propagated by the devil, but which also seem to tempt us quite naturally on their own.

I think immediately of all the isms. Racism, sexism, ageism, elitism, individualism, extremist nationalism, terrorism, and others. These aren't people. They aren't demons. They're

concepts and categories, they're ideas that arise within or enter into the hearts and minds of men and women and carry us away from God and other people.

Ideas are some of the most powerful things in the world. For example, in the name of communism, a political ideology, over 100 million human beings died worldwide last century as Russia, China, Cambodia, and other nations embraced a non-religious idea about the form and function of society and eradicated those who did not.

Think of any of the things that get you fired up from the headlines, and ask yourself – what's the idea behind it? Ask yourself, *why* are people doing this? *Why* are they behaving this way? It's because they *believe* something. What is that? *What do they believe?* And then ask yourself, does that belief, that value, line up with God's truth? Or not?

Are they driven by, committed to, influenced or guided by, an argument or idea that **exalts itself against the knowledge of God**? And what about you? What ideas shape you and form you? What are the things that guide you? Have you bought into any **arguments** that either subtly or boldly **exalt themselves against the knowledge of God**? Do they need to be **brought into captivity**? Are they leading you to look more like Christ, both the lion and the lamb, or weighing you down as you try to follow Him?

You see, Paul says we are supposed to fight, we are supposed to **war**, but it's a different kind of battle, against a different kind of enemy, using a different kind of weapon than you might initially think. It's the war beneath the war that really matters – the war against the ideas, the arguments, the isms, the **high things that exalt themselves against God**.

That's important because you need to know, people *can* abandon, or be delivered from, their ideas, and they can be saved.

Isn't that what Paul is hoping and praying will occur? Doesn't he keep saying he's **pleading** with the Corinthians to see things differently, do things differently? Isn't he hopeful for change? And hasn't he seen it himself? Paul remembers who he was without Christ. I do too. And so do some of you. You remember who or what you were before Christ came into your life.

And many of you know who you would be today without Him in your life. Because even as you follow Him, you're still pounded and pelted, pulled and tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. Anger, depression, bitterness, envy, and a host of other sins might not have control of your life, but it's only because you're fighting them off regularly. **Taking thoughts captive and submitting them to Christ**.

So, when you look out on the world, or when you go to work or school tomorrow, remember: people are not your enemy. Every soul, no matter how mangled or twisted, can be saved. We believe that. Don't we? We should desire it too.

Don't let your anger, even your righteous anger, twist you into hating, despising, loathing, mocking, or degrading the soul of a human being that God wants to save, just because it's trapped in a stronghold resistant to God. Ask God to help you love them.

Now, that does not mean you have to accept them. You do not have to endorse them. You actually can't. You cannot approve of, support, or endorse anyone who is driven by an ideology that runs counter to the character and commands of God. You may in fact, need to oppose them.

But don't hate *them*. Hate the lies that drive and motivate them. Fight the war beneath the war, the war against everything that [exalts itself against the knowledge of God](#). But as you do, remember, Jesus is both the lion and the lamb. He came to save people, He's still calling people to be saved, and He's sending us out as ambassadors of His Kingdom to deliver the message, to be lights in the dark.

And don't forget, there are still pockets of rebellions in each of our hearts too. There are still ideas and arguments that come naturally to us that we need to resist just as much as we resist the things going on out there, in the world.

So, we've said there is a war and we need to fight in it. The question is how? Let's talk about how to do it in our own lives and realize the strategy is same when you're fighting spiritually for someone you love or something you care about.

Paul lays out a three-phase strategy. The first is to pull down strongholds. The word here is used in other places in ancient literature to describe siege warfare. So, picture this fort or castle that has been established in the collective culture or in our individual lives. And what is true about a fortress? It's hard to attack, it's meant to survive. It's meant to endure.

Anyone who has ever tried to drive something like lust or anger or anxiety out of their lives knows this. The walls are thick. But, listen, history is full of stories, great stories, of strongholds that seemed unconquerable and yet they eventually fell and today people tour the ruins and take selfies there.

Christian, you need to know this. The flesh or the enemy, some temptation or tendency or desire may have had a long time to set up camp in your heart and mind. Back in the Marine Corps they taught us that you never stop improving your fighting position. The longer you stay in one place, the more defensible, survivable, and lethal you make it. So, the stronghold in your life maybe a marvel of engineering, a testimony to strength, but *it can fall*.

God has given you the weapons you need – we read earlier about the Armor of God – you keep suiting up, spending time in prayer, in the Word, in fellowship asking others to pray for you and with you, to help you and encourage you and eventually, *that stronghold will fall*. Listen to me: it won't be strong forever.

And when the walls have been broken, it's time for phase two, you capture the enemy – bringing [every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ](#). You learn to reign in your

mind. When temptations call your name, you learn not to follow. You fill your mind with something else instead. Worship music, Scripture you memorized, you crank out some pushups, you get up and do something. But you don't just let whatever thoughts come wandering through your mind take over and start building a new stronghold to live in.

Finally, phase three – once the walls are torn down and the enemy is captured, you punish disobedience – the idea here in the original Greek is like conducting a court martial. You put the idea on trial to see what God has to say about it. If it is not submitted to Christ, or resists Him, you need resist it, answer it, and expel it.

This is how you fight the war beneath the war. It doesn't always look or seem impressive. It's not flashy or trendy. But it's the path Jesus walked. It's a path with both the paw prints of a lion and the hoof prints of a lamb because Jesus is both.

He is gentle and lowly, approachable, graceful and humble when you come to Him, and ferocious in the pursuit of justice and righteousness, in defense of His people and His kingdom.

Jesus is calling you to war and supplying you with the weapons for it. But it's the war beneath the war. It's a war for the allegiance of your heart and the arguments and ideas in your mind.

Now, some of you don't just have fortress or two inside the borders of your life, you're actually living in the fortress, sitting on it's throne. You're trying to live your own life, your own way. You need to raise the white flag of surrender. Jesus is outside and He won't go away. You can't wait Him out. But you need to know: He's merciful to all who surrender. He will forgive you and make you His own. You can switch teams, and you should.

You see, Jesus wants to plant a flag inside our souls and begin taking territory. For many of us, He's already done that, but we still feel the resistance in some parts of our lives. You feel the presence of ancient fortresses with thick walls.

I'm here to tell you, from personal experience, those walls can fall. *Those walls will fall.*

So, put on the armor of God, invite Him into your issues, invite other Christians in to help you, keep pulling, those walls will fall. Nothing can stand against God forever.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 Spiritual Warfare: Tearing Down

Summary: There is a war beneath the war, and while the people who fight it don't seem outwardly impressive, they're following the pattern of Jesus.

- Look up at least one of each set of the following verses. What do you learn about Jesus the lion?
 - Matthew 15:1-12 and Matthew 23:13-33
 - Mark 11:15-17 and John 2:13-16
- What qualities of Jesus would have been easy for you to accept? Which would be hard?
 - What do you like about Jesus the lamb?
 - What do you like about Jesus the lion?
 - What do you like about the fact that He's both?
- What kind of leader do you look for in the church?
 - How do you know someone is a "good" leader?
 - What qualities are you naturally drawn to?
 - What qualities should we value?
- Read Jeremiah 1:1-10. What was Jeremiah appointed to do? What role did words play?
- The following verses use military analogies for the Christian life. What do you learn from each?
 - 1 Timothy 1:18 and 6:12
 - 2 Timothy 2:3-7 and 4:7
 - James 4:1-3
 - 1 Peter 2:11-12
- What are the strongholds you notice that have been established in our culture? How can these be pulled down using spiritual weapons?
 - What are some strongholds that commonly remain in the lives of Christians?
 - How can they be pulled down?
 - Have you pulled down any strongholds in your own life? What did you learn about the war beneath the war in the process?