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### Spiritual Warfare: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

#### Introduction:

1. "The greatest spiritual battle of our generation is being fought between our ears." (Allen). This quote from Bible teacher and New York Times Bestselling author, Jennie Allen in her book *Get Out of Your Head* explains the struggle of controlling our thoughts and thinking on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and anything excellent and worthy of praise as seen in Philippians 4:8. It is indeed the greatest spiritual battle women face today. It's a type of spiritual warfare that every woman must fight.
2. Spiritual warfare happens when a believer fights against Satan as he tries to keep them from pursuing God's calling in their life (Swearingen). Spiritual warfare does not mean that someone is being attacked by demons on a continuous basis. It can look like depression, anxiety, their head being filled with lies, etc. Anything that can hinder someone from believing truth about God or from fulfilling his calling in their life can be considered spiritual warfare (Swearingen).
3. Maybe in the short time I have been speaking, you have already identified your spiritual battle, or maybe you need some help. Is it worry? Melancholy? The feeling that you have sinned too much to be forgiven? The thought that God couldn't possibly want you or love you because no one else seems too? Is it that you believe that your works save you or grant you more favor with God than if you were without them? Maybe it's the fear of confessing your sin to fellow believers? Maybe your spiritual battle is your sin. Is it impure or lustful thoughts of a man? Maybe it's just ungodly thoughts about others in general?
4. My personal battle has recently been idolatry. It's very easy for me to idolize my boyfriend or our relationship. This is a daily battle for me to fight.
5. Whatever your spiritual battle is, no amount of self-discipline or behavioral conditioning can win the battle. Our physical weapons cannot change our minds and cannot change our hearts. It takes spiritual weapons supplied to us by the Holy Spirit to fight and be victorious in spiritual warfare. The apostle Paul speaks on fighting spiritual battles in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.
6. If you have your Bible's with you, I'd love for you to turn to 2 Corinthians 10 as that is where we will be spending our time today.

#### Background on text:

1. There is some background that we need to consider about the book of 2 Corinthians and about the members of the church in Corinth for us to be able to understand our text today in its proper context.
2. 2 Corinthians was the third letter written by the apostle Paul to the believers in Corinth. He most likely wrote it around A.D. 55/56, approximately one year after writing 1 Corinthians and a year before writing to the Romans (ESV 1,539). At this time, Paul was in Macedonia, which is located in Southeastern Europe today (ESV 1,539), on his third missionary journey (Gundry 689).

3. In 1 Corinthians 1:11, we see that Paul has received a report that things in the Corinthian church were not going well. So Paul writes 1 Corinthians to the church, but many reject his teaching. Paul then follows up with what he calls “the painful visit” in 2 Corinthians 2:1. After this visit, Paul writes a second letter to the church, which is now lost, that leads some, but not all of the people, to repent and reconcile their relationship with Paul. We see this in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Paul then writes this letter to reassure the people that he still loves them and to defend his ministry to those who have not yet repented (Bible Project).
4. This letter from Paul is centralized around the theme of the relationship between Paul’s suffering and the power of the Holy Spirit in his apostolic life, ministry, and message (ESV 1,539). Some members of the church in Corinth were saying that Paul didn’t really have any apostolic authority, claiming that he had suffered too much to be an apostle. By removing his apostolic authority, they discredit his teaching and convince the people that what he is speaking isn’t truth. Paul responds by explaining that his suffering is instead a means that God uses to display his glory (ESV 1,539).
5. The Holman Illustrated Study Bible gives an excellent one-sentence summary of the book. It says, “True Christian ministry, although it may have to be defended against false attacks, is commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Holman 1,685).”
6. Let’s read our passage for today, 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

*\*Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6\**

Main Idea:

1. The main idea of our passage today is this: we fight spiritual battles with weapons of divine power, which are strong enough to tear down strongholds and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Outline:

1. As we walk through this passage, we will see: Paul’s spiritual warfare in verses 1 and 2, that the weapons of our warfare can destroy strongholds in verses 3 and 4, and our battle plan for fighting spiritual warfare in verses 5 and 6.

Paul’s spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:1-6)

1. Let’s start by looking at Paul’s spiritual warfare in verses 1 and 2.
2. Here we see Paul make a “personal appeal,” as the Holman Christian Standard Versions translates it, to the Corinthians to repent (Moody 1,820). Paul does this by following the pattern of Christ and allowing them time to change their ways before he returns to judge (ESV 1,550). Being an apostle, Paul speaks on behalf of Christ to the Corinthians, so Paul speaks with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, not just an emulation of those things. This draws attention to the office of authority that Paul has because of his apostleship (Gundry 716).
3. Peter talks about what this meek and gentleness looks like in 1 Peter 2:23, which says:

*\*Read 1 Peter 2:23\**

- a. Jesus did not ridicule those who were judging him, instead he left their judgement up to the righteous judgment of God (ESV 1,674). Jesus did not retaliate when mistreated, and neither should his disciples (Moody 1,962).
4. Let's go back to our passage for today and take a look at verse 2. The Corinthians have fallen into believing the lies that the "false apostles", as Paul calls them in 2 Corinthians 11:13, have taught about Paul. They have convinced the people that Paul's mission and teaching is not truly from Christ (Garland 425). In verse 2, Paul begs the Corinthians to stop believing the teaching of the false apostles (Garland 431). He is willing to exercise discipline in person if necessary, with the confidence that Christ has given him the authority to do so in his apostleship. He longs for them to repent before he arrives however, so that he will not need to do so (Moody 1,820).
5. In the last part of verse 2, Paul speaks specifically of what his accusers have to say about him. Many are saying that Paul is "walking according to the flesh" (10:2). The Christian Standard Version says, "living according to the flesh."
  - a. What does Paul mean by the word "flesh"? We need to consider his definition of the word here in order to better understand this statement.
    - i. The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines "flesh" as our ordinary human constitution as opposed to our mental and moral qualities (Zondervan 481). The NIV translates the Greek in this verse to say, "live by the standards of the world." In other places in scripture "flesh" is translated to mean "human effort" in Galatians 3:3 and "sinful nature" in Romans 8:3-13 (Zondervan 481).
  - b. What do the false apostles mean by saying that Paul is living according to the flesh?
    - i. The false apostles are essentially saying that Paul's actions do not contain the supernatural divine power expected from an apostle (Moody 1,820). Essentially, they may be saying that Paul lacks the empowering spirit in his ministry or that he is not doing the ministry of Christ (Barnett 462).
6. As we move on through our passage, we see in verses 3-6 that Paul reflects on this accusation theologically.

The weapons of our warfare can destroy strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

1. Let's take a look at verses 3 and 4.

*\*Read verses 3 and 4\**

2. In these two verses, we see that the weapons of our warfare can destroy strongholds.
3. In verse 3, Paul begins by affirming that he does live a life *in* the flesh (Moody 1,820), but he tweaks the meaning of the word here. In this verse, he is using it to mean that he lives a life that is subject to bodily weakness (Garland 434). David E. Garland explains this well in the New American Commentary. He writes:
  - a. "To live in the flesh means that he possess no supernatural powers but is a frail clay vessel that is wasting away and given over to death." (Garland 434).
4. Though Paul lives in the flesh, he does not wage war according to the flesh. The battle he is fighting is spiritual and the war he is waging against his opponents is evidence of divine power in him (Moody 1,820).

5. Paul then talks about the weapons he is using to fight his spiritual war in verse 4. Paul says that these weapons “are not of the flesh but have divine power.” These weapons are by no means weak or fragile. They contain divine power from the Lord and should cause Paul’s opponents to tremble at their strength (Gundry 717).
6. What kind of weapons are these that contain the might and strength of the Lord, that cause others to tremble, and give Paul the confidence that he will be victorious in this spiritual battle?
  - a. This is not an exhaustive list, but a few of these weapons are prayer, the Word of God, faith, or the power of the Holy Spirit inside each and every believer (ESV 1,575). Paul writes more about weapons and armor for spiritual warfare in his letter to the Ephesians.

*\*Read Ephesians 6:13-17\**

- i. Paul uses the illustration of a Roman soldier’s armor to show God’s protection and offensive provision for believers as they encounter spiritual warfare. God’s Word, which is the sword of the Spirit and the only offensive weapon in the armor of God, can be used to turn back evil forces and to destroy strongholds, that Paul writes about at the end of verse 4 (Moody 1,855).
  - ii. Ladies, the Lord has provided you with weapons effective enough to fight your spiritual battles. You must simply choose to take advantage of them and use them. These weapons can be used to destroy an argument or lofty opinion and tear down any stronghold.
7. We understand that because our battle is spiritual, we need spiritual weapons, but what is a stronghold as Paul talks about at the end of verse 4?
  - a. The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary describes a stronghold as “intellectual pretensions that oppose true knowledge and that must be demolished with spiritual weapons” (Zondervan 1,398).
  - b. In simpler terms, the strongholds that Paul is destroying is the wrong thinking and behavior in the lives of those who resist his authority (ESV 1,550).
  - c. Some modern day examples of strongholds could be unconfessed sin. It could be lies we believe about God, ourselves, others, and the world. Strongholds could also be our worry and fear that we just cannot let go of, or our deep sadness and melancholy. Women have built these strongholds up in their minds and it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual weapons that Paul says they can be demolished.
  - d. Along with the weapons, Paul gives us a battle plan for fighting spiritual warfare.

Our battle plan for fighting spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:5-6)

1. Let’s take a look at verses 5 and 6.

*\*Read 2 Corinthians 10:5-6\**

2. First, in verse 5, Paul says that he will “destroy every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.”
3. “The knowledge of God” Paul writes of is any teaching from God being distorted by the false apostles (Barnett 466).

4. The New Living Translation translates this verse to say, “We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God.” Any false teaching of the gospel coming from the false apostles is an obstacle for those who do not know God to come to know Him (Barnett 466).
  - a. We can look at the modern day example of the prosperity gospel to better understand this. The prosperity gospel has led many people to believe that God is a genie who just wants you to be happy and will give you whatever will make you happy if you ask for it. This quote unquote gospel hinders people from truly knowing God because it does not convey the truth about how to know God at all. It does not talk about repentance or sin and it leaves out the entire idea of Jesus calling his disciples to take up their cross. Many people fall into the stronghold of the prosperity gospel, but our weapons of warfare can help tear it down.
5. After Paul “destroys every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God”, he continues his battle plan by “taking every thought captive to obey Christ.”
6. The word translated “thought” is used in other parts of Scripture as “mind” (Garland 437). He uses this same word in 2 Corinthians 4:4, which says, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (ESV). “The god of this world” in this verse refers to Satan (ESV 1,544). Later in 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul uses the word again. This verse says, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from the sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (ESV). To stick with Paul’s war analogy, Satan is the enemy who is holding the Corinthian’s minds captive, and Paul is prepared to fight whatever battles necessary to liberate them by bringing their thoughts under the Lordship of Christ (Garland 437).
7. Once our thoughts have been taken captive, we can fight through the power of the Holy Spirit to take the thoughts of others captive for the obedience of Christ as well.
8. But how do we take our own thoughts captive?
  - a. John Piper shares about how we can take this verse to apply to us personally. He says, “So when John Piper reads that [that is 2 Corinthians 10:5], I should say, ‘Okay, Paul. Here I am. Do your demolishing work on me. Do your captive-taking work on me. Destroy in my mind any false or proud thoughts that I have about God.’” (Piper).
  - b. We take our thoughts captive to obey Christ by submitting our thoughts to scrutiny. This means that we compare our thoughts to Scripture and see how they align. If it is out of sync with the truth of God’s Word, then that is a thought that needs to be taken captive. We approach Scripture with a willingness to let God mold our thoughts into being holy and true and he will faithfully do so. It will not always be pleasant, but it will always be freeing (Piper).
  - c. We also take our thoughts captive by asking the Holy Spirit to work in us. We do not change on our own accord. The weapons that we fight with require power from the Holy Spirit to be effective. Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal your strongholds, arguments, lofty opinions, and ungodly thoughts and then allow him to change those thoughts to glorify and be obedient to Christ (Piper).

9. After Paul “destroys every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” and “takes every thought captive to obey Christ”, he comes to the final step of his plan and punishes anyone who is still disobedient when he returns to Corinth.
  - a. Who are the disobedient that Paul says he will punish? Commentaries give 3 different ideas. It could be the Corinthians that believe that Paul is walking according to the flesh, those unrepentant of sexual sin which Paul will address later in the letter in chapters 12 and 13, or it could be the false apostles. It is most likely that Paul is referring to the Corinthians who have said that he is walking according to the flesh since he doesn’t seem to be talking about new comers but those already inside the church and he addresses the sexually immoral at length later on in the letter (Barnett 467).
  - b. Paul doesn’t mention what this punishment for disobedience is, but his willingness to take such strong action shows how seriously he takes their disobedience (Barnett 467).
  - c. Paul knows that true freedom from sin is found in the gospel of Christ and he longs to see everyone free. Paul understands that the strongholds built up in the minds and hearts of believers can hinder their relationship with God, but the Holy Spirit provides a way for believers to tear down their strongholds and take their thoughts captive to obey Christ.

#### Conclusion and Application

1. In our passage today, we saw that we fight spiritual battles with weapons of divine power, which are strong enough to tear down strongholds and take every thought captive to obey Christ.
2. Dear sisters, do not be discouraged if you must destroy some mental strongholds in someone in order to win them to Christ. Praying for them and speaking the truth of God’s Word into them are effective weapons in breaking their strongholds and taking their thoughts captive to obey Christ.
3. It’s also important to reflect on and consider what strongholds, arguments, and lofty opinions you have built up against the knowledge of God that need to be destroyed. What lies have you believed about the gospel or about God? Is it that you must do so many good works to be loved by God, or that your sin is too great for God to forgive? These strongholds hinder you from knowing true freedom in Christ. Tear down those strongholds with your spiritual weapons and take your thoughts captive to obey Christ. Do your thoughts about God, the gospel, yourself, and the world reflect what the Bible teaches about them? Search the Scriptures and compare what you think to be true with what the Bible says. If your thoughts don’t align, ask the Lord to change your heart and mind about those things to help you believe and think on what is true.
4. What spiritual weapons do you need to add to your arsenal to fight spiritual warfare? Prayer, Bible study, faith, the armor of God? Where could you be fighting better? How could you be fighting better? Whatever it may be, ask the Lord to help you take up that weapon well and fight to win your spiritual battles through the strength of the Holy Spirit.

5. Create a battle plan to help you win the war against your strongholds. My battle plan for my war against idolatry I mentioned earlier is simple; I have people that hold me accountable, I ask the Lord to help keep our relationship in its proper place in my heart, and I meditate on Scripture that reminds me of God's faithfulness towards me. My boyfriend will fail me, but the Lord will not and continuously reminding myself of this truth is key to allowing me to fight this spiritual warfare.
6. To close, I'd like to leave you with one more quote from Jennie Allen's book, *Get Out of Your Head*: "We are in charge of our thoughts. They are not in charge of us." (Allen).
7. Sisters, your thoughts don't rule you. Your sin doesn't control you. Christ has set you free from their hold. Take your thoughts captive and live in the freedom of Christ.

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