

Spiritual Warfare: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Open in prayer

1. Introduction

- a. *Discussion question: What do you first think of when you think of spiritual warfare? What does this term mean?*
- b. Spiritual warfare happens when a believer fights against Satan as he tries to keep them from pursuing God's calling in their life (Swearingen).
- c. 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).
- d. Women can experience spiritual warfare in many different ways. We try to fight against our mental battles by changing our habits or by practicing good mental health patterns. However, the only way to truly win our mental and spiritual battles are with spiritual weapons supplied to us by the Holy Spirit. Paul writes about fighting in spiritual warfare to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

Ask participants to turn to 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

2. Background

- a. There is some background information we need to consider to be able to look at our passage in its proper context.
 - i. 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).
 - ii. 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).
 - iii. 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. Paul responds by explaining that his suffering is instead a means that God uses to display his glory (ESV 1,539).

- iv. 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).

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

3. Main Idea

- a. 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.

4. Body

- a. Let's see this idea as we walk through this passage starting by looking at verses 1 and 2.

Ask someone to reread verses 1-2

b. 2 Corinthians 10:1-2: Paul's Spiritual Warfare

- i. In these verses, we see Paul's spiritual warfare. He is making a "personal appeal," as the Holman Christian Standard Version says, to the Corinthians to repent, following the pattern of Christ (Moody 1,820) by allowing them time to change their ways before he returns to judge (ESV 1,550). Because he is 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. He doesn't explain what it means for Christ to be meek and gentle, but Peter touches on this idea in 1 Peter 2:23 (Gundry, 716).
- ii. **Read 1 Peter 2:23**
 - 1. Jesus did not ridicule those who were judging him, instead he left their judgement up to the righteous judgement of God (ESV 1,674). Jesus did not retaliate when mistreated, and neither should his disciples (Moody, 1,962).
- iii. 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).

- iv. 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.” The Christian Standard Version says, “living according to the flesh.”
- v. 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 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).
- vi. *Discussion Question: In light of this definition, what do you think the false apostles meant when they accused Paul of walking or living according the flesh?*
 - 1. 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). In verses 3-6, Paul reflects on this accusation theologically.

Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

c. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4: The Weapons of Our Warfare Can Destroy Strongholds

- i. In these verses, we see that the weapons of our warfare can destroy strongholds. 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. He does not use it to apply to misguided human standards, but instead to live a human existence that is limited in power. The New American Commentary explains this very well. It says, “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). Paul is simply saying that he is subject to bodily weakness (Garland 434).
- ii. But though he lives in the flesh, he does not wage war according to the flesh. Though he is flesh himself, the battle he is fighting is spiritual. The war he is waging against his opponents is evidence of divine power in him (Moody 1,820).
- iii. In verse 4, Paul talks about the weapons of his warfare. Paul says that these weapons “are not of the flesh but have divine power.” These spiritual weapons are not weak since they contain divine power from the Lord. Those who oppose Paul should be scared hearing about the strength of these weapons (Gundry 717).

- iv. *Discussion Question: If the weapons Paul is referring to in this verse are not physical such as a sword or bow and arrow, then what weapons is Paul referring to?*
1. The weapons of Paul's warfare are not physical but spiritual, such as prayer, the Word of God, faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit (ESV 1,575)
 2. **Read Ephesians 6:13-17**
 - a. 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 (the sword of the Spirit) 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).
 3. The spiritual weapons Paul uses can be used by any believer when fighting a spiritual battle. These weapons, as Paul writes, are strong enough to destroy strongholds.
- v. But what is a stronghold?
1. 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).
 2. The strongholds that Paul is destroying with his spiritual weapons is the wrong thinking and behavior in the lives of those who resist his authority (ESV 1,550).
 3. Some modern day examples of a stronghold are unconfessed sin and lies we believe. Lies we believe about God, ourselves, others, and the world can become strongholds in our lives that need to be pulled down. Anxiety and worry can also be a stronghold. This is not the clinical anxiety that many people often deal with, but the day to day worries and fears that many people struggle with letting go of (Aiyegbusi).
 4. *Discussion question: What are some other strongholds women in today's society have built up in their minds? What spiritual weapons can they use to destroy them?*

Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 10:5-6

d. 2 Corinthians 10:5-6: Our Battle Plan for Fighting Spiritual Warfare

- i. In verses 5 and 6, we see Paul lay out his three fold battle plan using his spiritual weapons to destroy the strongholds that he talks about in verse 4 (Moody 1,820).
- ii. First, Paul says that he will "destroy every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God."
- iii. "The knowledge of God" that Paul writes of here is any teaching from God being distorted by the false apostles (Barnett 466).

- iv. The New Living Translation translates this verse to say, “We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God.” Any false teaching coming from the teachers that Paul calls the “false apostles” is an obstacle for those who do not know God to know God (Barnett 466).
 - 1. Illustration: A modern day example would be the false gospel’s spread around Christian circles and churches. 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 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. So many people fall into the stronghold of the prosperity gospel, but our weapons of warfare can help tear it down.
- v. When we look at this phrase “against the knowledge of God,” we can better understand what Paul means when he talks about strongholds. The strongholds Paul is referring to may very likely be any intellectual arguments that humans use in an attempt to stave off the truth of the gospel (Garland 436).
- vi. Another important thing about this phrase to note is that Paul is talking about defending his apostleship here. David E. Garland talks about this very well in *The New American Commentary on 2 Corinthians*. He writes, “Those who have set up barricades against the knowledge of God have set up obstacles to block Paul’s influence in the community and have tried to refute his insights into the meaning of the gospel.” (Garland 437).
 - 1. What Garland is saying here is that the false apostle’s teaching doesn’t align with the Word of God. In their attempts to cause the believers in Corinth to buy into their teaching, they convince the people that Paul’s teaching is not from God. If the Corinthians believe this, then they will no longer listen to Paul’s teaching and will stop hearing the truth of the gospel.
- vii. The first step in Paul’s battle is to destroy every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. Paul continues his battle plan by saying that he “takes every thought captive to obey Christ,” but what does this mean?
- viii. The word translated “thought” is used in other parts of Scripture as “mind” (Garland 437). In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul writes, “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 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 from their prison. Their thoughts need to be freed by coming under the Lordship of Christ (Garland 437).

- ix. Once our thoughts have been taken captive, we can then fight through the power of the Holy Spirit, to take the thoughts of others captive for the obedience of Christ as well.
- x. How do we take our own thoughts captive?
 1. John Piper has this to say about this verse, "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).
 2. 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 stronghold needs to be destroyed and 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).
 3. 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 we fight with are spiritual and require a power that only the Holy Spirit can provide. 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).
 4. *Discussion questions: Take a moment to think of a thought that you have that needs to be taken captive to obey Christ. Think about what Scripture has to say about it and how you can use spiritual weapons to bring it into captivity under Christ's Lordship. Or maybe think of a time you took a thought captive to obey Christ. How did you do it? If you feel comfortable sharing, what is that thought or what weapons did you use?*

Have write out a "battle plan" on a notecard for them to use to take the thoughts captive that they have identified

- xi. Paul's first step in his battle plan was to destroy every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and the second was to take every thought captive to obey Christ. The last part of Paul's battle plan is to punish anyone who is still disobedient when he returns to Corinth.
- xii. 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 (2 Corinthians 12:21; 13:2), 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).

- xiii. Why does Paul feel the need to punish those who have not submitted their thoughts to being captive to Christ? Because he 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.

5. Conclusion and Application

- a. The main idea of our passage today was 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.
- b. Today we discussed:
 - i. Paul's spiritual warfare he was facing when writing this letter to give us a better contextual background on the passage.
 - ii. We discussed how the weapons of our warfare can destroy strongholds.
 - iii. And we talked about the battle plan we have to fight in spiritual warfare. This plan consist of: destroying every argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ, and to punish every disobedience.
- c. One commentary has this to say about verses 3 through 6: "Paul's stirring words in verses 3-6 serve to encourage ministers of the gospel to remain faithful to the gospel, and to believe their ministry to be powerfully effective, even though there are detractors—as there were with Paul—who find little to encourage them that a work of the Spirit is occurring." (Barnett 468).
- d. 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.
- e. 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? Theses strongholds hinder you from knowing true freedom in Christ. Tear down those strongholds with your spiritual weapons. 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.

- f. 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.

Ask the women if they have any questions or comments and close in prayer

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