

The Book of 2 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: The Weapons of Our Warfare

2 Corinthians 10:1–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Corinthians 10 opens the final, more combative section of the letter, in which Paul defends his apostleship against critics who measured ministry by worldly standards. Doctrinally, the teacher should draw out Paul's teaching on the nature of spiritual warfare: the Christian is engaged in a real battle, but it is fought with divine, not fleshly, weapons, and its decisive battlefield is the realm of ideas and thoughts. The aim of this warfare is the comprehensive lordship of Christ, taking every thought captive to obey Him. The chapter also teaches the folly of self-commendation and comparison, and locates true approval not in the verdict of self or critics, but in the commendation of the Lord.

This chapter has both a corporate and a deeply personal application, and the teacher should hold them together. On the corporate side, it warns the church against fighting its battles with the world's weapons, manipulation, intimidation, political maneuvering, image management, and calls it instead to spiritual means: truth, prayer, the word of God, the gentleness of Christ. On the personal side, it presses into the inner life, calling each believer to recognize the strongholds of false thinking that have taken root in the mind and to bring every thought under the obedience of Christ. The renewing of the mind is not a peripheral matter; it is where much of the Christian battle is won or lost.

At the same time, the chapter is meant to form humble, courageous disciples. It models a boldness grounded in the meekness of Christ rather than in self-assertion. It calls us to stop judging by appearances and to stop playing the exhausting game of comparison and self-commendation. And it frees us by fixing our eyes on the only verdict that matters, the Lord's. So aim at both targets. Help students understand the spiritual nature of the battle and the weapons that win it, and lead them to take their own thoughts captive to Christ and to seek His approval above all.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul begins his confrontation by appealing "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (v. 1), even as his critics call him weak in person. What does it teach us that Paul grounds his boldness in Christ's meekness, and how does this challenge the world's assumption that gentleness is weakness and force is strength?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the surprising way Paul opens a confrontation: “I entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” He is about to deal firmly with his critics, yet he roots his approach in the gentleness of his Lord. Boldness and meekness are not opposites in Christ; they are joined.

Help students see how this overturns worldly assumptions. The world equates gentleness with weakness and aggression with strength. But Jesus, the strongest figure who ever lived, was “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). His meekness was not the absence of power but power under perfect control.

Draw out the model for handling conflict. Paul does not abandon gentleness in order to win; he leads with it even as he stands firm. This challenges our instinct to become harsh when we feel we are right or under attack. Christlike strength holds truth and gentleness together.

Note that this gentleness is not compromise or cowardice. Paul will be very bold in this chapter. But his boldness is clothed in the character of Christ, not in the swagger of the flesh. The goal is firmness without harshness, conviction without contempt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The union of boldness and gentleness in the character of Christ (Matthew 11:29)
- Meekness as power under control, not weakness
- The challenge to the world’s equation of aggression with strength
- Firmness and gentleness held together in handling conflict

Discussion Prompts

- How can boldness and gentleness coexist, as they did in Christ?
- Why does the world mistake gentleness for weakness?
- How might the meekness of Christ reshape the way you handle conflict?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to equate gentleness with weakness, either despising it in yourself or abandoning it when you want to win? How might the meekness and gentleness of Christ reshape the way you handle conflict and disagreement?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the previous truth into the student’s own conflicts. When we feel threatened, criticized, or determined to win, gentleness is often the first thing we abandon. We tell ourselves the situation calls for toughness.

Help students examine their default mode in disagreement. Do they become harsh, sarcastic, cold, or domineering when they want to prevail? Do they secretly despise gentleness as a losing strategy? The honest answer reveals whether Christ's character governs their conflicts.

Offer the alternative Paul models: a firmness that remains gentle, a conviction that does not become contempt. Gentleness does not mean surrendering the truth; it means holding it in a Christlike spirit, refusing to let the desire to win override the call to love.

Encourage one concrete situation, a tense relationship, a recurring argument, where they will deliberately bring the meekness of Christ. The aim is to fight conflicts as Christ did, with strength clothed in gentleness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to abandon gentleness when we want to win
- Christlike conflict that holds truth and gentleness together
- Gentleness as strength rather than surrender of the truth
- Refusing to let the desire to win override the call to love

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to equate gentleness with weakness?
- What is your default mode when you feel attacked or determined to win?
- In what relationship could you deliberately bring the meekness of Christ this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh" (vv. 3–4). What does this teach about the true nature of the spiritual battle the Christian is in, and why can the world's weapons never win the battles that matter most?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul states the principle plainly: "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh." Christians live in the world and face real conflicts, but the battles that matter most cannot be won by worldly means. There is a war on, but it is a spiritual war.

Help students grasp why the world's weapons fail here. You cannot manipulate, intimidate, or out-argue someone into the kingdom of God. You cannot win a heart by force or change a soul by political maneuvering. These are fleshly weapons, and they are powerless against spiritual strongholds.

Name the spiritual weapons by contrast: the truth of God's word, prayer, the gospel, love, the gentleness of Christ, the power of the Spirit. These have "divine power." They may look weak to the world, but they accomplish what no worldly weapon can.

This reframes how the church engages its struggles. When we feel embattled, our instinct is to reach for the world's tools. Paul calls us to a different arsenal entirely, one that looks unimpressive but carries the power of God. The kingdom does not advance by the methods of the kingdoms of this world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The spiritual nature of the Christian's real warfare
- The powerlessness of worldly weapons against spiritual strongholds
- The divine weapons of truth, prayer, the gospel, love, and the Spirit
- The kingdom advancing by God's means, not the world's methods

Discussion Prompts

- Why can the world's weapons never win the battles that matter most?
- What are the spiritual weapons God has given us?
- When have you seen worldly methods fail to accomplish a spiritual goal?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you feel you are in a fight, to be right, to be respected, to get your way, what "fleshly" weapons do you reach for: manipulation, sarcasm, intimidation, the cold shoulder, winning the argument at all costs? What would it mean to lay those down and fight differently?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to name the fleshly weapons they personally reach for. When we are in a fight, to be right, to be respected, to get our way, we often grab whatever works: sarcasm, manipulation, intimidation, the silent treatment, winning the argument at any cost.

Help students be specific and honest. These weapons are so familiar we hardly notice them. The cutting remark, the guilt trip, the cold withdrawal, the relentless need to have the last word, all are fleshly tools we deploy to win.

Point out that these weapons, even when they succeed, leave damage behind. We may win the argument and lose the relationship, prevail in the moment and grieve the Spirit. Fleshly weapons cannot build what God is building.

Encourage students to identify their go-to fleshly weapon and to lay it down in a specific relationship this week, replacing it with a spiritual one, prayer, honest gentle words, patience, love. The aim is to stop fighting God's battles with the devil's tools.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The familiar fleshly weapons we deploy to win
- The relational damage left by worldly weapons even when they succeed
- Replacing fleshly tools with spiritual ones
- Refusing to fight God's battles with the world's methods

Discussion Prompts

- What "fleshly" weapons do you reach for when you want to win?
- What damage do those weapons leave behind, even when they work?
- What spiritual weapon could you use instead in a specific relationship?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says the weapons of our warfare "have divine power to destroy strongholds... arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (vv. 4-5). What does this teach about the kind of strongholds we are called to demolish, and why is the real battlefield often the realm of ideas, beliefs, and arguments rather than visible enemies?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul names the targets of our warfare: "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God." The strongholds we are to demolish are not made of stone but of ideas, beliefs, philosophies, and arguments that exalt themselves against the truth of God.

Help students see that the decisive battlefield is often the realm of ideas. Behind much human resistance to God lie deeply entrenched beliefs, a worldview, a philosophy, a set of assumptions, that have been built up like a fortress. These strongholds shape how people see everything, and they must be torn down by the truth.

Apply this both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly, the church contends not against people but against the false ideas that hold them captive, and it does so with the truth of the gospel, not with force. Inwardly, each believer must recognize the worldly ideas that have lodged in their own mind.

This dignifies the life of the mind in the Christian battle. Truth matters. What we believe shapes how we live. The demolishing of strongholds is the patient, Spirit-empowered work of replacing lies with the knowledge of God, both in the world and in our own hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Strongholds as entrenched ideas and arguments opposed to God's truth
- The realm of ideas and beliefs as a decisive spiritual battlefield
- Contending against false ideas, not against people, with the truth
- The importance of the mind and of truth in the Christian battle

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the battlefield often the realm of ideas rather than visible enemies?
- What does it mean to demolish a "stronghold" of false thinking?
- How do we tear down strongholds with truth rather than force?

Question 6

Student Question:

What is one "stronghold" of thinking in your own life, a deeply rooted belief, assumption, or argument that exalts itself against what God says is true? Where has a lie or a worldly idea built a fortress in your mind that you have stopped questioning?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question turns the demolishing of strongholds inward. Every believer carries some entrenched belief or assumption that exalts itself against what God says, a lie we have believed so long it feels like fact.

Help students identify their own strongholds. These often sound like settled truths in our minds: "I am beyond forgiveness," "I must be in control to be safe," "my worth depends on my success," "God could never really love me," "I cannot change." Such ideas form fortresses that resist the knowledge of God.

Point to how strongholds are demolished: not by willpower but by the truth. We tear down a lie by replacing it with what God actually says, holding His word against the false belief until the fortress gives way. This is patient work, often requiring repetition and the help of others.

Encourage students to name one stronghold and one truth of God that confronts it, and to begin deliberately bringing that truth against the lie this week. The aim is to let the knowledge of God demolish the fortresses the enemy has built in their minds.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Entrenched lies and assumptions as personal strongholds
- The demolishing of strongholds by God's truth, not willpower
- Replacing false beliefs with what God actually says
- The patient, Spirit-empowered renewing of the mind

Discussion Prompts

- What stronghold of false thinking has built a fortress in your mind?
- What truth of God directly confronts that lie?
- How could you begin bringing that truth against the lie this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul rebukes those who “look only on the surface of things” (v. 7) and who measure ministry by outward impressiveness rather than by the Lord’s approval. What does this teach about the danger of judging by appearances, and about where true authority and approval actually come from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul rebukes those who “look only on the surface of things.” His critics judged him by outward appearance, his unimpressive presence, his plain speech, and concluded he lacked authority. They mistook the absence of worldly polish for the absence of God’s power.

Help students see the danger of judging by appearances. The world is endlessly impressed by surface, image, eloquence, confidence, success, and endlessly blind to what God values, faithfulness, humility, love, integrity. To judge by the surface is to judge as the world judges, and often to get it exactly backward.

Recall that God Himself does not judge this way. When Samuel sought a king, God said, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The Lord’s assessment runs deeper than the surface that so impresses us.

Draw out the question of approval. Paul’s critics commended themselves and one another, but Paul cared about a different verdict. True authority and worth come not from impressive appearances or self-promotion, but from the Lord who sees the heart. This frees us from the tyranny of appearances, our own and others’.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of judging by outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7)
- The world’s blindness to what God values
- True authority and worth coming from the Lord, not from image
- Freedom from the tyranny of appearances

Discussion Prompts

- Why is judging by appearances so dangerous?
- How does God’s way of seeing differ from the world’s?

- Where do you most need to stop judging by the surface?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where do you tend to judge yourself or others by surface appearances, success, image, eloquence, confidence, rather than by what God sees? How might that habit be distorting the way you value people, including yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the matter of appearances into the student's own habits of evaluation. We constantly assess ourselves and others by surface measures, success, image, eloquence, confidence, popularity, and these assessments quietly shape how we treat people.

Help students notice the consequences. Judging by appearances leads us to over-value the impressive and overlook the faithful, to despise ourselves when we lack polish, and to crave the approval of those whose standards are merely worldly. It distorts our sense of worth, our own and others'.

Point to the corrective: learning to see as God sees. This means valuing the quiet, faithful, humble servant the world ignores; refusing to measure our own worth by worldly success; and seeking God's approval rather than the crowd's applause.

Encourage one specific shift this week, perhaps honoring someone the world overlooks, or refusing to despise themselves for lacking some surface quality. The aim is to align our valuing with God's, who looks on the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Surface measures distorting how we value people, including ourselves
- Over-valuing the impressive and overlooking the faithful
- Measuring worth by God's standards rather than worldly success
- Seeking God's approval over the crowd's applause

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you judge yourself or others by surface appearances?
- How might that habit distort the way you value people?
- What would it look like to value someone this week as God values them?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says the aim of our warfare is to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (v. 5), and he concludes, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends” (vv. 17–18). What does it mean for the lordship of Christ to extend to every thought, how is this inner warfare central to the Christian life, and why does genuine spiritual victory lead us to boast in the Lord rather than in ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it deserves rich treatment. Paul names the goal of all our spiritual warfare: “to take every thought captive to obey Christ.” The lordship of Jesus is meant to extend not merely to our outward behavior but to the inner world of the mind, every thought brought under His obedience.

Help students feel the scope of this. “Every thought.” The worries we rehearse, the resentments we nurse, the lustful or proud or fearful imaginings we entertain, the lies we believe, all of it is to be marched into obedience to Christ. This is not a peripheral discipline; it is central to the Christian life, because the inner world drives the outer one. Much of the battle for holiness is won or lost in the realm of the thoughts.

Explain the practical work of taking a thought captive. It means catching a thought as it rises, holding it up against the truth of Christ, and refusing to let it run loose if it opposes Him. A thought of bitterness is brought to the One who forgives; a thought of fear, to the One who reigns; a lie, to the One who is the truth. This is active, deliberate, Spirit-empowered work, repeated countless times, by which the mind is renewed (Romans 12:2).

Then connect this to the chapter’s conclusion about boasting. Paul’s critics commended themselves and compared themselves with one another; Paul refuses the game: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” Genuine spiritual victory does not puff us up; it humbles us, because we know the power was God’s, not ours. The one who has truly taken thoughts captive to Christ does not boast in his own discipline but in the Lord who gave the victory.

End by holding the two together. The comprehensive lordship of Christ over the mind and the boast in the Lord belong together. To bring every thought under Christ is to dethrone self, including the proud, self-commending self. The aim of the whole battle is not our glory but His, a life in which Christ reigns over the inner world and receives the praise for every victory. Help students embrace this inner warfare as the daily, central work of discipleship, fought in dependence on Christ and ending in His praise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The comprehensive lordship of Christ extending to every thought (v. 5)
- Inner warfare in the realm of the mind as central to discipleship

- The practical discipline of taking thoughts captive and renewing the mind (Romans 12:2)
- Genuine victory humbling us rather than puffing us up
- Boasting in the Lord rather than in self-commendation (vv. 17-18)
- The Lord's commendation, not our own, as the verdict that matters

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for the lordship of Christ to extend to every thought?
- How do you practically take a runaway thought captive to obey Christ?
- Why does genuine spiritual victory lead us to boast in the Lord rather than ourselves?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, the meekness of Christ, the spiritual nature of the battle, the demolishing of strongholds, the captive thoughts, the boast in the Lord. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage, and what is your first step toward that change this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the chapter and asks for one specific change. Help students avoid generalities; the chapter has pressed on the meekness of Christ, the spiritual nature of the battle, the demolishing of strongholds, the captive thought, and the boast in the Lord.

Invite each student to discern the Spirit's particular pressure. For one it may be handling conflict with Christlike gentleness. For another it may be laying down a fleshly weapon. For another it may be tearing down a stronghold of false thinking or beginning the daily work of taking thoughts captive.

Ask for both the change and the first step. The change is the inward reorientation; the step is concrete, a thought confronted with truth, a weapon laid down, a verdict surrendered to the Lord.

Close with the chapter's liberating truth: only the Lord's commendation matters, and genuine victory ends in His praise, not ours. That is the disciple this lesson is meant to form, one who fights the real battle with God's weapons and boasts only in the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation, not mere information, as the goal of study
- The daily renewing of the mind under the lordship of Christ
- Dependence on God's power in the spiritual battle
- Seeking the Lord's commendation above all

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this chapter is the Spirit pressing on you most directly?
- What single change is Jesus inviting you to make?
- What is your first concrete step toward it this week?