

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Lesson 10: The Weapons of Our Warfare -- 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

The tone of the letter shifts here, and you can feel it. For nine chapters Paul has been opening his heart, comforting, encouraging, teaching about grace and giving. Now he squares his shoulders. There were people in Corinth who had been running him down behind his back. They sneered that his letters were weighty and strong, but that in person he was unimpressive, "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." They measured ministry the way the world measures everything, by appearance, polish, and force of personality. And so Paul takes up the matter directly, but notice how he begins: "I entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Before he says a word about battle, he plants his feet on the character of his Lord.

That is important, because this chapter is about a war, and Paul does not want us to fight it the wrong way. "For though we walk in the flesh," he says, "we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." There is a real conflict raging, but it is not the kind that is won with the world's weapons, clever manipulation, intimidation, political maneuvering, or sheer charisma. The real battle is fought on a different field, with a different arsenal. The strongholds Paul means to demolish are not made of stone. They are made of ideas, "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God."

And the goal of the campaign is breathtaking in its scope: "to take every thought captive to obey Christ." Every thought. The lordship of Jesus is not meant to govern only our Sunday behavior or our public profession. It is meant to reach into the inner world where the real battles are won and lost, the thoughts we rehearse, the assumptions we never question, the arguments we let live rent-free in our minds. Christ lays claim to all of it. The Christian life is, in large part, the slow and deliberate work of marching our thoughts, one by one, into obedience to Him.

Paul closes by exposing the folly of the comparison game his critics were playing. They were busy commending themselves, measuring themselves against one another, boasting in their own credentials. Paul refuses to play. "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." In the end, only one verdict matters, and it is not ours and not our critics'. It is the Lord's. Read this chapter and learn to fight the real battle, on the real field, with the real weapons, and to seek the only approval that lasts.

Group Discussion: Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (vv. 3-4). What "fleshly" weapons are Christians and churches tempted to rely on when they feel they are in a battle, whether for influence, for being right, or for getting their way? What does it look like, by contrast, to fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons?

Personal Reflection: Paul describes taking “every thought captive to obey Christ” (v. 5). What are the thoughts that most often run loose in your mind, the worries, resentments, lusts, fears, or lies you rehearse, that have never been brought under the lordship of Christ? What would it look like to begin taking those specific thoughts captive?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1–18

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 6:10–18, the whole armor of God for standing against spiritual forces; Romans 12:1–2, transformed by the renewing of the mind rather than conformed to the world; Philippians 4:8, setting the mind on what is true, honorable, and pure; 1 Peter 5:8–9, resisting the devil, firm in the faith; Jeremiah 9:23–24, not boasting in wisdom or might but in knowing the Lord