

Up to this point in the letter Paul has mostly been addressing the repentant Corinthians. Now in chapters 10-13 he will address the unrepentant minority. We often quote part of the passage for today regarding our spiritual battles, and while it is applicable, we are pulling it out of the context of the passage. Paul is telling the Corinthians how his team fights spiritual battles and are ready to deal with the unrepentant who are being divisive and undermining the gospel.

¹ I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— 2

Corinthians 10:1 The word that begins this passage in the Greek text (*de*) is a connective word and is translated as and, now, but, so, therefore, moreover, and similar wording. In this case the ESV translators chose not to translate it. But if we look at the previous sentence, we see Paul was writing about the surpassing grace of God and called it an indescribable gift. That is why I prefer the word “therefore” to be included. We have this indescribable gift of grace and therefore he makes this appeal to the Corinthians.

The word Paul chose for *entreat* is *parakelo*, a word we have seen many times and is used for the Holy Spirit. It is that compound word that means to stand beside someone and call out. It is because of the indescribable gift of grace that Paul calls out to them by two wonderful attributes of Christ that express that grace: His meekness and gentleness.

Meekness is power under control. Moses was said to be the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3ⁱ). He certainly had great power, but it was under the control of his relationship with God. The rare time we see him misuse his power is the second striking of the rock for which he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:10-12ⁱⁱ). Moses’ humility was seen from the very beginning when he confessed himself incapable of the task God set before him (Exodus 3:11ⁱⁱⁱ). But his power was seen in his complete submission to God in whatever God asked him to do. That is why he could prophesy that the Messiah would be a person like him (Deuteronomy 18:15^{iv}).

Imagine if Jesus who has the authority to command angel armies dealt with His detractors in a carnal way (Matthew 26:53^v). The temptation in the wilderness -BOOM- no more Satan. The Pharisees attacking his character - BOOM - on their knees begging for mercy. The Romans at the cross - BOOM - they are on the cross instead. But what we see is His meekness and gentleness. “*Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34)! That is meekness and gentleness. What would you have done if you had the authority of Jesus? God help us to let His character be expressed in us (2 Corinthians 4:11^{vi}). We are to be like Him.

I think gentleness is an underappreciated attribute. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23^{vii}). Our culture prefers the self-confident, authoritative leader. We see gentleness as weakness, but in the spiritual realm it is a great attribute. Forcefulness can change a person’s behavior, but it will not change their heart. Gentleness is the harder route but the only one that will reach a heart. Even tough love can be expressed with the gentleness of Christ.

Paul tells them that when he is present, he expresses the humility of Christ, but when he writes to them the boldness of Christ comes out. He may be referring to that missing letter of correction Titus delivered. It is somewhat ironic, as Paul’s humility is probably something that the false teachers derided. Roman culture saw humility as a

weakness. By appealing to the humility and gentleness of Christ, he was defusing their point of attack. Jesus did not present Himself as someone with a big ego (Philippians 2:6-8^{viii}). Thus, Paul's humility and gentleness was not a weakness but a godly attribute.

² I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. 2 Corinthians 10:2 Paul wants the Corinthians to disassociate with the false teachers so that he does not have to discipline them with one who is walking after the flesh. Accusing someone of what you are guilty of is typical of those who live for this world. Meekness and gentleness do not need to hinder justice. Remember meekness is submission to God and He may see that it is necessary to execute justice, which is another righteous attribute. Paul was ready to be God's instrument for that, if necessary, but he would rather come in gentleness. God disciplines those He loves. His gentleness limits that discipline to what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13^{ix}). Nevertheless, God's love will bring whatever is necessary to cause us to reconsider our ways. That is meekness and grace. It is gentleness toward the flock when the shepherd smites the wolf that would devour a lamb. Paul is not talking about a physical attack, but of bold spiritual discipline for the sake of the flock.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 2 Corinthians 10:3 We live in these carnal fallen bodies. They get sick. They have involuntary reactions. They will die. That is what he means by walking in the flesh in this passage. We are carnal beings. However, Christians do not fight our spiritual enemies or our physical enemies with guns or knives or fists or mere intellectual powers. There may be a time for physically defending the flock from violence, **but the issue in this passage is spiritual warfare. That is the war that matters.** The wars of nations will come and go. The battles with neighbors will soon be forgotten. It is the spiritual that matters.

What is behind abortion at any stage in a pregnancy is a spiritual issue? Why are children being confused about their gender? What is this push for a worldwide government? Many of the issues in politics in our day are spiritual issues. The most important thing to bring about change is to change hearts, and only Jesus Christ can change the heart. I have watched the change of mind follow the change of heart that comes when a person accepts Christ. When the Word of God touches the heart, our minds conform to that of Jesus. There was a popular t-shirt years ago that read, "Real men fight on their knees." In other words, real men do not use fists but prayer.

There is a cosmic war for the souls of men and women. We are born by nature on the losing team. But when the Word of God takes root in our hearts, we begin to side with righteousness. The way we see the world is corrected, and we see it as it really is. The next verses tell us how to participate with God in this battle to free those who have been taken captive by sin.

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 2 Corinthians 10:4 First Paul tells us what we do not fight with. We do not use fists or even our own intellect. He told them in the first letter that they had witnessed him preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit and power (1 Corinthians 2:4,5^x). That kind of real authority will silence his critics and reveal their immaturity.

That power is not a physical attack but something even more powerful. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword (John 18:11^{xi}). He told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, otherwise His servants would fight (John 18:36^{xii}). I remember when someone

was yelling at me in a business I owned because he had a problem using a device that I rented to him. After his tirade, the next customer kindly reminded me that it was not about me. It was a problem within that man. There was a war going on within him. If I responded like he did, it would only have escalated. Meekness and gentleness show we are in Christ who has already won.

Our weapons are the same as those our Savior used, the Word of God and prayer.

In Matthew and Luke 4 when Jesus was attacked by the Devil, He counter attacked with the Scriptures. Satan tried to use Scripture too, but Jesus countered him with another Scripture (Luke 4:4^{xiii}). But to do what Jesus and Paul did, we must be familiar with the Word. We need to hide it in our hearts (Psalm 119:11^{xiv}). The Word prompted by the Holy Spirit is the divine power that can destroy strongholds. I watched it happen in someone's life just last week. The fruit of the Spirit broke through their walls of ritual.

Strongholds are defined in the next verse. They are what keeps the sinner captive. *Every fortified city had strongholds, bulwarks that were particularly impregnable.*

"Strongholds" references the central arguments that fortify his opponents' message.^{xv}

They are arguments and opinions that we form from this fallen world. Here is one popular one used today that is right from the pit of hell. "If it does not harm anyone and no one will find out, how can it be wrong?" Or how about this one? "Everyone does it, so what is the big deal?" Pride is a stronghold, for the prideful will not accept the need for a Savior. I could go on and on because I have had so many pass through my fallen mind. For these false teachers the strongholds were pride and religious dogma. They are all justifications for giving-in to the flesh and ignoring our holy Creator who gave us life and breath and all that we have. Strongholds are lies that keep us from being who God created us to be and keep us thinking we are in charge of our own lives. Until we see the harm they are doing to our lives, we will not attempt to break out of them.

Carson explains, *"Paul's language of destruction here is not merely about winning arguments or debates. "He means something far more: his weapons destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God."^{xvi}*

⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul has been using a number of military terms: weapons, warfare, strongholds, and in this verse "lofty opinion" which is a high thing, a position of advantage in warfare. *By stacking these terms, Paul portrays his ministry as a mighty, conquering army that overcomes every opposing force.^{xvii}* He does not use smooth rhetoric or charismatic flare, rather his weapons have divine power to lay those high things low.

"We" refers to Paul's team, but just as "our warfare" referred to the battle that Paul's team was fighting, and yet it applies to that which we fight. So, "we" in this verse can apply to us as well. God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11^{xviii}). Paul's team of ministers destroyed arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. If we will become familiar with God's Word and yielded to the Holy Spirit, then we will do the same. Paul is probably referring to those arguments and opinions of the false teachers, and yet we face the same in our old nature and from unbelievers even within the church. Just as Jesus answered the attacks of His enemies, so we too can look to the Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us **destroy arguments against the knowledge of God. That is not just to know there is a God but to know His nature as revealed in**

Scripture. One stronghold is a distorted view of the God of the Bible. Some see Him as an angry God who is mean spirited. Others see Him as a God who is only love. The knowledge of the true God, the Biblical God, is a God of love but also one of perfect justice and holiness. He is gracious but He is also righteous and cannot let evil go unpunished (Numbers 14:18^{xix}).

Before Jory came to Christ, he had lots of arguments against the knowledge of God. Kindness and prayer broke down the walls of lofty opinions and began to soften his heart. He realized his thinking was completely wrong.

Before Zach came to Christ, he saw himself as an enlightened teacher, but the gospel humbled him and transformed his thinking from many disciplines to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6^{xx}). But that is the beginning of the work of the Lord in us. Then we must take every thought captive to obey Christ. While Paul may have been speaking of the false teachers' points of doctrine, it can apply to our thoughts that are ungodly as well. **Taking thoughts captive is a lifelong part of the battle.**

When we were unbelievers, we formed patterns in our minds of ungodly thinking. It may be a tendency to complain, or an addiction that promised relief, faith in money as security, or anything that was against the knowledge of God. Those ruts do not always go away when we come to Christ. We must take those thoughts captive if we are to be obedient to Christ.

We first learn to recognize them and what triggers them. Then we avoid the triggers. When the pattern starts, we turn to the Lord in prayer and refuse to go down that old rut, but instead, we start praising God for the freedom we have to choose to not dwell on the ungodly thought. That is taking it captive to obey Christ. Not going down that path is victory. You may have to do it a hundred times a day, but the more faithful you are to do it, the easier it gets. **The Holy Spirit will help us turn from sinful thoughts to praising God that we do not have to let them stay in our minds.** Realize that you are being obedient when you do that. God is helping you live in victory over what had enslaved you and kept you in the enemy's camp. We replace the evil thought with godly thoughts or songs of praise. Memorizing a Scripture that counters your weak area is a great weapon (John 8:32^{xxi}). *Could anything be more wonderful than to have every thought experience captive obedience to Christ? Could we wish anything better for others?*^{xxii}

Remember that Paul is saying this is what he does for the Corinthians. That means that if we are in the Spirit, we can wage war for our brothers and sisters, or that we might receive the same help from our elders. The Word shared tears down strongholds when we let it take hold in our hearts (1 Timothy 4:15^{xxiii}). I have watched many of you slowly being transformed by listening to the preaching of the Word. I can tell you stories of people who came to Wayside and later moved on, but before they left, they confessed that the Word had changed them from nominal believers to lovers of God, from living for self to wanting to be of service to God and His kingdom. The war was won in their lives by the power of the Word. No wonder the author of Hebrews refers to the Word as *living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12^{xxiv}). In Ephesians Paul calls it the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17^{xxv}).

I am grateful to Jory for choosing to preach on Psalm 119, for every verse reminds us of the importance of the Word of God. God has chosen language to communicate with

us His nature and our need. The Bible is our source of truth, a history book focused on the way God brought about salvation to fallen man. It is our source of comfort, guidance, and discernment.

What a privilege today that we can carry it with us everywhere we go. I hope you all have a Bible app on your phone. It is translated into almost every language on the planet because God so loved the world that He gave us His Son, and the Son is the living Word made flesh (John 1:14^{xxvi}). Jesus' parable of the soils teaches us that the Word received is the source of fruit in our lives (Matthew 13:8^{xxvii}).

⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. 2 Corinthians 10:6 This passage is a warning to the Corinthians that Paul and his team mean business. They are jealous for the purity of the Corinthian church. They are not coming for a physical take down of the false teacher, but they are coming with something much more powerful, the Word of God. Once the Corinthians have fully complied with the Word, Paul and team will come and punish those who are being disobedient.

In the Old Testament, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal. When God sent fire from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the water, and even the stones of the altar, Elijah single handedly slaughtered the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:38-40^{xxviii}). Well, Paul was not threatening to be physical, but he was declaring he has as much authority and power to deal with those who were misleading them. If you lived in Corinth and heard this part of the letter read, you would think twice about whose side you were on. They had no doubt seen miracles at the hand of Paul. His warning would have been taken very seriously.

There have been times when we have had to do the same here. **Spiritual boundaries must be maintained for the protection of the hearts and minds of the congregation.** It is rare, but it does happen. And it also happens in ways unseen in each of our lives. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5,6^{xxix}). That is because He is our good Father who wants to protect us of the harm we would incur if we went our own way. Sometimes He causes us pain so we will not cause ourselves even greater pain.

May our meekness and gentleness always make way for the Word of God to demolish the strongholds in our lives, and by the grace of God be the channel through which God destroys those strongholds in the lives of others as well. May we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ for our good and His glory, and may we encourage others to do the same.

Questions:

- 1 By what did Paul make his appeal? Why?
- 2 Who is Paul addressing in verse 2?
- 3 What is our battle?
- 4 How do we fight it?
- 5 What kind of power do we have?
- 6 What is a stronghold? Examples
- 7 What must be destroyed? Why?
- 8 How can we take thoughts captive?
- 9 How does Scripture describe our weapon?
- 10 Why is discipline necessary?

ⁱ **Numbers 12:3 (ESV)**

³ Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.

ⁱⁱ **Numbers 20:10-12 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” ¹¹ And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. ¹² And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Exodus 3:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

^{iv} **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

^v **Matthew 26:53 (ESV)**

⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

^{vi} **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{vii} **Galatians 5:23 (ESV)**

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{viii} **Philippians 2:6-8 (ESV)**

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

^{ix} **1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

^x **1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

^{xi} **John 18:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

^{xii} **John 18:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

^{xiii} **Luke 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

^{xiv} **Psalms 119:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

^{xv} Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 174

^{xvi} Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity*, p. 47^{xvi}

^{xvii} Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible, II Corinthians*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), p. 459.

^{xviii} **Romans 2:11 (KJV)**

¹¹ For there is no respect of persons with God.

^{xix} **Numbers 14:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

^{xx} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xxi} **John 8:32 (ESV)**

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

^{xxii} R. Kent Hughes, [*2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 184.

^{xxiii} **1 Timothy 4:15 (KJV)**

¹⁵ Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

^{xxiv} **Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)**

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

^{xxv} **Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

^{xxvi} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xxvii} **Matthew 13:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

^{xxviii} **1 Kings 18:38-40 (ESV)**

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." ⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

^{xxix} **Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."