## Politics, Strongholds, and Jesus

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[0:00] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.

And now, today's sermon. This might be one of America's history's most essential and debated election season.

Both sides of the debate have arguments against the others. And how to handle the evil in our country is a debated topic. There's many opinions on the future and the possible future destruction of our country.

If you look closely enough, you will find that our nation has fallen into paganism of the past. And yes, I mean paganism, the kind we all cringe at when we read the Old Testament.

Human trafficking of children, abortion, and even, yes, human sacrifices and cannibalism. I hate what I see. And it's so evil and destructive in many of you and almost all of us here feel it.

[1:15] I'm seeing more and more pastors turn on pastors to talk about and accuse them because they're not mentioning politics and giving their opinions of what should be done from the pulpit.

Pastors call other pastors words because they don't agree on how things should be said or what political side they should be on.

Or they say too much or too little. I'm not going to tell you what my political opinion is this morning.

For that would be the wisdom of men. That would be my wisdom. I also don't care what some political news outlet or some celebrity has to tell me about my faith and also my future as it relates to this country.

Fight we must. This is what we're called to. But how we fight genuinely does matter. Since the resurrection of Christ, we have been called into a battle for humanity.

[2:28] America is the way she is now because of some presidents and their decisions, some political parties and their decisions. But that's not the true blame.

America has become the powerhouse of evil because of those who once dominated the country, which is the gospel preaching churches, have become silent.

And they've stopped using this weapon of the gospel and have moved toward moralism and legalism. We're not going to do a history lesson this morning, but this is the result of revivalism, the American revivalism in our country.

We saw the world impact. It could have if churches were to go back and actually use the weapons that were given to them, but instead we're using human knowledge and abilities.

And we even begin to boast in our strength as a country throughout history. We trust in our weapons of mass destruction, and we trust in our economy, and we indulge in the country's entertainment as believers.

[3:38] And now paganism has replaced the preaching of the gospel because it works. And we turn towards this, or even as Christians we turn a blind eye towards it.

Paul is accusing the church in Corinth for doing the very same act that's going on here in our country, in our church. We have turned toward the power of the wisdom of men, of fleshly ingenuity.

And in doing so, we have no power to keep out evil, not only in our own hearts, but those around us. And as this happens, the indulging only gets worse.

And it's not only just in our country, but it comes into our homes and into our minds. This morning I wanted to look at how Paul helps the church in these moments of despair.

There is no new battles. There's nothing new that Paul is facing with the Corinthian church that we're not facing today. They just have new names and new locations.

[4:44] We face an old foe with new tricks here in our country. And he has moved from using kings and emperors in the past to using politics, media, and power today.

As Paul dissects the Corinthian church and then provides them the solution, let's then apply the same hope because the solution that Paul is giving does not change because the faces and locations change, thankfully.

I have four points that Paul points out for us this morning. Paul talks first about the deceptiveness of the strength that they're trusting in.

The deceptiveness of strength. Specifically, he's dealing with, if you don't understand the story and context of the whole book, you're not going to really understand what he means here in chapter 10, verse 1.

But let me read it again and explain it to you so you understand what's going on. I, Paul, myself, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. This is a contrast to the leaders that are in the church right now. They wrote Paul and told him, basically, you sound strong in your letters, but you're weak in your presence.

You're not a very dynamic leader. You're not a very powerful speaker. And the men that we have in our church right now who were leading them in doctrinal heresy, trying to use old Judaism and to use the law to change the heart and to transform the city, Paul says, yeah, they are using human strength because there is no spiritual power.

I stood with you in meekness and gentleness because I stood with you in the power of Christ, not in my strength. 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 of us walking according to the flesh.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. So this church is responding and saying we want strong, dynamic leaders who know how to speak and they can use wisdom and they can use the strength of the mind to fight back against the paganism of our culture in our city.

And Paul says, it is not with the flesh that we are going to win this war. This is why he specifically words it this way. For though we walk in the flesh, though this is what we carry around with us, the way in which we engage in this war to save the souls of men and to change their mind and to protect our minds, we don't do it with the flesh.

These men that Paul is referencing had an outward strength that Paul, one, he describes himself as a skinny, frumpy, awkward man.

[7:44] That's how he described himself. You wouldn't walk by him and be impressed. But yet what comes out of the man's mouth transforms the world because it's not his own strength.

This is why he says, I, Paul, myself, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Meekness is not weakness. We do see this in today's culture. If you're not the loudest, if you're not the most brash, if you're not the most outlandish, then you're just weak.

You're a pacifist. You're sitting by and not saying anything. You're allowing evil to progress. And this is not the truth. Meekness is power under control.

This is, I believe, Warren Worsby said this, wise pastor. Meekness is power under control. They wanted to fight back against the evil that they faced by using human power and human ingenuity.

And Paul says, this is not what we're going to use. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Paul has a very, very long section in his book where he first introduces this to them and teaches this to them in his first letter.

[8:53] So 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And if we begin in verse 18, this is where he begins. This is a very long section, but I want to read all of it because I want you to hear just how Paul wants you to think about yourself and this concept of a power that is in words.

He says this, 1 Corinthians 1.18. For the word of the cross is folly, a more common word that we would say is foolish or stupid or ridiculous. To those who are perishing, this would be the lost.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. So the words that are formulated on this page that tell us about Jesus, this is what Paul is saying.

God's power is packed down inside of it. You know that we have more technology in your pocket right now? Some of you have more technology on your wrist if you have an iPhone or iWatch, whatever it's called, than we did in modern spaceships in the 70s, whether we did or didn't go to the moon.

When you think about power being condensed down into something, our brains can somewhat think about that.

[10:04] He's saying all of God's power is condensed down into words. So just think about this as we're reading this. All of God's power, he says, somehow he packed it into words.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom, verse 19, the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning, I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?

Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? It doesn't matter how smart we are, you cannot compare. For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

The smartest people in the world are not the ones who end up knowing God. God, this is really good news for me. For those of you that know me, they wouldn't describe me as the wisest person they know.

As a matter of fact, if you want to know what I do for a career, according to Paul, what I do is very foolish. I preach foolish sermons. Think about it.

[11:08] He says, through the folly of preaching, God's power is displayed. Through the weakness of this man, God's power is described. Not through the wisdom, not through my power.

Verse 22, for Jews demand signs. We want to see God's power. And Greeks seek wisdom. We want it to make sense. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews.

What do you mean? You're telling me about a guy who died? That's not a sign. And folly to Gentiles. That's not strength. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. So if God had weak parts of him, which he doesn't, it would be far, far greater than anything we could conjure.

For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to the worldly standards. Not many of you are powerful. Not many of you were noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

[12:10] God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that it is written, let the one who boasts, boasts in the Lord.

Real quick, just turn to chapter two. Paul, in reference to this, then describes why he acts the way he acts. First Corinthians 2.30, and I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, and my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom.

People would look at it and go, wow, Paul's a powerful preacher. Man, the guy can just give it to you. Nope. Nope.

He says, I was pretty weak and frail. But in demonstration of spirit and power. Why? Because what came out of his mouth was more important than how it came out of his mouth.

[13:23] Are you catching this? It's what they believed in, which is the truth of the gospel, so that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. This is the only reason that week after week, I find the strength to stand up here and preach, because I feel like an idiot often standing up here, because I am probably a worse sinner than you are, and I'm teaching you the gospel.

Now, that's irony. That's irony. I'm not standing up here because I find myself wiser than you. I find myself standing up here because the spirit commissioned me as a weak and frail.

Look at the list of, he says, this is who was called to preach the gospel. Weak, frail people. So there was no man on earth that should have a faith in themselves or another human being that can tear down what God's gospel can tear down.

We boast in a power that is so far beyond any human, and yet that power comes from the weakest and the smallest of voices, including these children.

These children can speak the very power of God. Now, that is something to ponder. So he uses this phrase, if we move on to point two.

[14:55] So they have, definitely they're looking at a deranged strength. They're looking at the deceptive strength, the one that appears as wise, but it has no wisdom.

And Paul moves on to a divine power. We've referenced it, but let's look at verse 10. So turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. We'll be here now for a while. 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 4.

He says this. He is agreeing with them that they were going to fight, but it's how they fight and what they fight with. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power.

The word there is theos. You could translate it, for the weapons of our warfare are God's power to destroy strongholds.

I'll tell you what, if I was going into any kind of battle, you know, I kind of want, I definitely don't want to bring a squirt gun to a gunfight or a sword to a gunfight.

[15:56] I kind of want to bring something that's got some punch to it. And someone walks over and goes, oh hey, by the way, this thing has got God's power. I'm like, whew, I'm pretty sure I'm going to win this fight. That's a good fight, right? Many of you probably have seen the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

I'm a sucker for adventure movies and stories. And in this particular movie, Indiana Jones or Indy is in the hunt for the Holy Grail. What you might not know is that that story is loosely based on a fact.

This is an actual event that happened, except for they never actually found the Grail that we know of, because it probably doesn't exist. During World War II, there was a man who was born during this period.

His name was Henrik Himmler. He lived from 1900 to 1945. And he was the leader of the Nazi SS. And he was seen as the second most powerful man in all of Germany, next to Adolf Hitler.

And Himmler was fascinated by the occult and was fascinated by mystery. And he wanted the Holy Grail. He believed in its power.

[17:12] And the actual real Indiana Jones is by the name of Otto Rahn. He was actually hired and commissioned by the Nazis to go and find this Holy Grail.

Because Himmler believed that the power of whoever held the Grail held the power within it. And not only could hold the power and wield the power of the Grail, but they would also have eternal life.

And so spent millions of dollars and took thousands of lives to try and find this. And ultimately ended up taking Otto's life as well. And they never actually found the Grail.

But the human mind, we have the capacity to do this. Whether it's technology, where we believe and we are becoming more and more trusting in technology.

We're even putting the technology into our bodies, to where we were placing body parts that can make us stronger. We can even fix and heal our brains with technology. Whether it's technology or some kind of a mystic holy relic, we always are looking for a power that seems to be contrary to the absolute power because that's how foolish we are.

[18:30] God's power was not said to be packed in a relic or in a massive cathedral or in any other kind of object that you can hold in your flesh.

What's interesting is you can't hold the power of God in your hand. It only is held in words. That's why I think it's interesting that John calls Jesus the Word.

He is the embodiment of power. It fascinates me to think that from the smallest and quietest voices, God could change and transform someone's life and city and world from a child's voice who's simply in its simplest forms because Jesus even says, even they can believe.

You don't have to have a degree in quantum physics in order to change the world or have a plan to go to Mars. The weapons, according to Paul, they're words.

They're words. And it's hard to embrace it to think that words have power. And what kind of power? Now this is the part that I'm excited about. I'm gonna make sure that I get this all in here.

[19:54] What kind of power do these words hold? This is the second, or this is our third point. This is where Paul's leading to us now. He's talking about destroying strongholds.

For those of you who are taking notes, I did this for you. I tried to come up with all Ds. So deceptive strength, divine power, and destroy or destroying strongholds.

Look at 2 Corinthians 10, verse 5. For we destroy arguments in every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

What's a great example of a stronghold? I found this commentary to be helpful. It's worldly thoughts, ideas, reasonings, and philosophies are like fortresses in our mind.

In one's mind, in that they function, in effect, to barricade or to shut out enemy intruders. And these enemy intruders would happen to be the gospel.

[20:54] So if you're thinking about a fortress or a castle that has a moat around it, this is what the world does. This is what evil does. This is what Satan and depravity does to our heart and our mind.

And it creates, literally, later on in Corinthians, early on in Corinthians, Paul says, as you are projecting the power of God, Satan's running around and he's running interference and he's blinding the minds of the unbeliever because he understands what the power of the gospel can do.

The evil that lives within the hearts of humanity is not going to be removed by some kind of fleshly wisdom or technology. It's not going to happen.

The second part of verse five is another perspective, an idea of how it's being guarded. It says, every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. You have to think about it in this way.

They're talking about like a massive wall that guards itself against God. So as we are engaging the world and we're bringing God's power to them to change them, Paul is saying, all of these tactics that are being used, all of this power that guards the heart and the mind from God is destroyed because of the gospel.

[ 22:14 ] And this is when it says, we not only destroy it, but then we take captive the heart and the mind. You guys remember Ezekiel 36? We read it right after the prayer of praise this morning or the prayer of confession.

He says that he takes out the heart of stone, he puts in a heart of flesh, and then he comes and lives inside of you and causes you to obey. It says here, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Only the gospel has the power to do this. This is a quote from D.A. Carson. It says Paul's language of destruction here is not merely about winning arguments or debates.

I think I've always read this passage this way. This is so helpful. 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.

In Paul's own words, his spiritual weapons tear down every high thing, lifted up against the knowledge of God. Paul is referencing the citadels of sin in our lives.

[23:19] Every high thing, every haughty thought, every action that forms a barrier to the knowledge of the living God. Now this is theory for a moment.

This isn't theory. But how do we make this practical? How do you see the preaching and the teaching of God's word of the gospel come into a culture and literally start to morph and change the mind so that the actions follow?

I love doing church history reading. I recently was re-reading a book by a famous Christian who lived between 150 A.D. and 215 by the name of Titus Flavius Clemens.

His more popular name that you may have heard of is Clement of Alexandria. I love how they just kind of changed the way that they named themselves. We should try it.

Instead of being Jonathan Edward Moffat, I'm going to be Moffat of Spring Hill. Doesn't really roll off the tongue, does it? Clement converted to Christianity after a very, very long intellectual and spiritual search.

[24:33] He was born into a pagan household, a Greek pagan household that made sacrifices to the gods and lived for the gods. As a pastor, he ended up writing a book called Exhortations to the Greeks.

And this was an apologetic work aimed at convincing pagans of the truth of Christianity and the absurdity of their world. Listen to how he writes describing just the absurdity of their world.

Certainly while they, the Greeks, suppose that they are offering acceptable sacrifices to the demon, they quite forget that they are slaughtering human beings.

For murder does not become a sacred offering because of the place in which it is committed, not even if you solemnly dedicated a man and then slaughtered him in a so-called sacred spot of Artemis or Zeus, rather than for anger and covetousness covetousness or other demons of the same sort or upon altars, rather than in roads.

On the contrary, such sacrifices is murder and human butchery. And we would say, wow, what a rough time to live in Greece, in Rome.

[ 25:50 ] See, the stronghold of paganism held the Greeks' mind that one must make human sacrifices to receive the power of the gods and the protection of the gods, namely in this case, Artemis and Zeus.

They were foolish and ignorant is what we always say. How dim-witted could they be to think that killing another person would produce such power and freedom?

And yet, to what reason do we see in our culture the promotion of abortion? the freedom of a woman's right to not be held captive or bound.

We have become the gods ourselves. We worship ourselves and sacrifice at the pleasure of ourselves and we will sacrifice others. And then, for our own pleasure, we convince children to mutilate their bodies, creating all kinds of psychological and permanent damage and often leading to their own taking of a life.

And to carry out such an act of wickedness is a stronghold of the mind. This is what Paul is speaking of, not only in his day but for ours. For years now, Christians have been trying to use fleshly means to stop this kind of evil and yet, the evil continues to only rage.

[ 27:19 ] How many of you have been alive long enough to realize as you think about the history of our country that it is not gone sideways or up but it has plummeted in depths that even I can see and I'm very young.

But it is. Conversations that my eight-year-old is having to engage in are thoughts of horror for me when I was eight. Never even have to think about these things.

And yet, we keep trying to use human ingenuity and power to curb it and it won't work. It never worked in the past and it won't work now.

Clement, later on in his letter, he says this, For lust is not easily restrained when it has no fear.

Think about that. Lust is not easily restrained when it has no fear. Nothing is holding back the salacious desires and the feedings of the passions here in our world and specifically our country.

[28:32] Paul even warns us about trying to use fleshly means to try and control these types of desires. If you want to write it down, it's Colossians chapter 2 and verse 23. He gives a list of things that people have tried and says they indeed have an appearance of wisdom and promoting self-made religion.

We love to pat people on the back. You're such a good person. Look how well you've done because you have asceticism and you have treated your body severely but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

So then where does Paul point us to? He points us to the weapons of words. Not just any words. Not the wisdom of men. Not psychology or psychotherapy.

He points us to the gospel that the world cringes at. As overwhelming as the evil of this world can be, we don't have to carry the burden of the world.

At times I do. I think all of us do at some points. How do we change the world? I have a lot of respect for people who are trying.

[ 29:40 ] There's a lot of wise men and scientists and doctors out there who have a genuine heart to help humanity. They really do. And in part we can play a little role.

We can provide mercy. But you'll never be able to remove the evil because the evil is not something you're strong enough to fight. Satan is far stronger than you are and he's the one we're fighting.

Remember, we are rescuing people out of the kingdom of darkness and we're putting them where? One political person or one political party is not the enemy. They literally are the mission field.

They are the ones that have the strongholds that need to be broken down. Satan is the one who is imprisoning them. We have forgotten what it is that we are fighting for.

Then what are we doing? Then what are we doing in this political season and this going forward for the rest of our lives? We are destroying strongholds in the minds of people around us.

You see, you and I can't change the world because Jesus promised he would. When Jesus returns, what is the promise? I, not you, I, will make all things new.

I will wipe away your tears. I will guarantee there will be no more sin, no more death, and no more pain. And this is what we're trying. We're trying to offer what Christ says, I have that already.

You don't need to do that. I need you to love and speak truth. I need you to love and speak truth. But Jesus, we would rather change the world.

This is what you're telling him. And in our attempts to change the world in our way, we actually leave people in their strongholds. And we make ourselves vulnerable because our minds are now not captured by the gospel and we ourselves have strongholds of sin in our own life.

So we are not arguing with people. This isn't the case. By the way, if you think you're supposed to go out and just lamb blast Facebook with, like, just with truth, we're gonna win the war!

[32:00] I thought that was funny too. I appreciate that. Lunch is on me today. No. What's interesting is that Paul started this conversation with his position.

He is a meek man. He is a humble man. He is a man who understands his frailty and understands that it's through his love and through the administration of the gospel, through his words, through gentleness and meekness that will transform and break down the hearts of people.

So we, this goes back to 1 Peter. Remember where Peter was saying, don't leave your jobs, don't leave your government, pray for your leaders. As Dick Holmes did and as all those who come and do the prayer of praise, every Sunday we pray for our leaders.

Why? Because we want to live peaceable lives underneath their leadership because we are trying to make sure that we can be a light and a salt. We talked about this with the ladies yesterday in Matthew chapter 5.

We're a city on a hill. We're drawing people to, literally, Jesus says that our good works are a reflection of who we are in Christ and as people see our good works, they glorify our Father and how is it they're gonna glorify their Father?

is that when the stronghold of the mind is open and they can see why we're doing what we're doing. So when people say it doesn't matter what you do, all that matters is what you say, that is foolish because God says it's speaking the truth in love.

It's in love we tell the truth. So if you wanna feel like you are making an impact in our city and in our world that your life actually has meaning, it literally starts with, are you ready for this?

As hard as this might sound, it starts with being nice. It really does because we are controlled by Christ, not the circumstances that are around us.

When they revile, we don't revile. When they are hateful, what do we do? We love in return. And when they say, why do you act this way? Well, because I have a power from God.

It's called the gospel. Would you like to hear about it? You can literally rescue people and give them a hope. People who have been abused, who have been treated in ways that you and I can possibly understand, who have no hope for their life.

There's no way that they think they can function going forward after what another human has done to them. You can sit them down and you can give them a cleansing and a washing and a power and a hope that is far beyond anything that has happened to them or anything that will happen to them by loving them and telling them the truth of Jesus Christ.

Christ. The power that rests in this room really can change the world of someone here. God will deal with the evil of Satan but we can rescue and help and empower and strengthen those who were underneath his control and put them underneath the control of Christ.

This is such an important work that you may not understand the last verse which we'll close with quickly. This is 2 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 6. This is such an important work that Paul says that he as an apostle being ready to punish every disobedient or every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

There's a lot of debate on what this could be and I think what he's talking about is being disobedient in his instructions of what you just gave. Embracing the power that tears down strongholds or disobeying this instruction and turning towards the power of the wisdom of the world.

And Paul says we're going to need to discipline people who refuse to listen to this because it's destructive. And in this church we do believe in church discipline. We do believe that to be unloving and unkind and to be fallacious with your mouth and to be addicted to things is not the freedom is not we are putting ourselves literally back into a stronghold that the gospel sets us free from.

So this type of discipline for the disobedience is not out of anger but it's out of compassion. Paul is still talking about meekness and gentleness. When he writes to the Galatian and the Galatian church had some problems he says those who are trapped in sin go to them with a spirit of meekness and gentleness lest you too fall into sin and restore them.

So there's a little bit of passion in my voice and there's excitement in my voice because I really believe that if we abandon the wisdom of the world we do not need to put our trust in politics or people but we can put our trust in the gospel and if the church continues to do what it's supposed to do which is proclaim the gospel we will see it affect our politics we will see it affect our culture and we will see people relieved from it.

Now that being said sometimes I can come across confusing so I want to create some clarity. It may sound like I'm saying don't care about the government don't care about voting that's not what I'm saying.

As a matter of fact as Christians we are to take opportunities where they arise to care for the weak and protect the vulnerable and in our country we've been given a very unique opportunity to do this where we can take the truth that we know of God and the reflection of what he has for humanity and we can use our country and the power that's been given to us in our voice to advance in further truth and to care for those who are weak.

Sometimes people say well there's no candidate that I think is worthy of my vote. You're not voting for a pastor. Remember this. Your vote isn't affirming who they are either.

You're trying to simply think with the power that I have can I help my neighbor who is in need? Can I do that? That's all you're doing.

And then you're not putting your hope in your vote. Where are you putting your hope? In the knowledge that's behind the vote. Right? In the gospel. I think that sometimes we can be accused of not caring about our neighbor and I want to be very clear that those of us who believe in the power of the gospel want to love our neighbor and we always want to do what is best for our neighbor given any means possible.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Father I'm so thankful that I have a congregation of brothers and sisters my fellow my fellow sheep that I am with that they show up today and they truly want the gospel.

They want to hear you remind them of your love for them. Lord we are not gathered here today to talk of politics or to talk of the future of politics but Father we are here today to be in the wonder of your power that you somehow have put into the very mouths of foolish people even children a power that can change the world.

May we center our lives around this truth may we wash it in our hearts and our minds daily may we encourage each other may we pray for each other in Christ's name Amen.

[39:31] Thanks for listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee where everyone is in equal need of grace. To plan a visit or to learn more about us visit our website at gracereformed.org