

The Rules of Engagement

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[0 : 00] 1 to 6. And let's just start by reading that together. 2 Corinthians 10, verses 1 to 6.

This is the Apostle Paul. I, Paul, myself entreat you. I'm reading from the ESV. 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'm away. I beg of you that when I'm 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. For though we walk in the flesh, 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. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete. The Apostle Paul often compared Christian living to life as a soldier, being a soldier in battle. In this text, he lays out rules of engagement.

I'm a former professional combat soldier, many years ago, and so I understand a lot about engaging the enemy. There are levels of threat that require different levels of response, and we call that the rules of engagement. In this text, Paul, in a sense, gives us, as Christian soldiers, rules of engagement so that we as good soldiers of Jesus Christ can know our enemy how to respond and why to respond so that we can be ready to respond swiftly without waffling or responding incorrectly or not responding at all. And we're also going to look at the principle in this passage and how that can be applied to our own lives and as well in our work of evangelism.

And we'll look at this. But before we do, I'd like to just take a moment to pray for this. Lord God, your sovereign word humbles us. We're humbled by your word. And I pray, Father, that what I say in the next few minutes will be what you have intended for us to hear so that we could learn from your word. I pray that you'll give me clarity of speech. I'll pray. I pray that we all here would learn from you and love you more so that we could serve you more out of delight.

I pray for this to happen by your powerful Holy Spirit for the glory of your name. Amen. So we're going to look at five aspects of battle. The prelude to battle, the preparation, the power, the plan for battle, and the purpose of battle, and then patience in battle.

[3 : 20] So in verse one, we can see the prelude for battle. I, Paul, myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. I, whom humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I'm away, I beg of you that when I'm 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.

Paul is essentially writing to two parties here with the same message. He's implying that those who are sincere in their faith in Christ and in Paul's leadership will not need to be reprimanded, but that he will certainly use boldness.

Boldness, that word means daring, fearless courage in his speech. But he chooses to implore the believers, the faithful. He chooses not to cause them to fear his return, but implied in that is that the false accusers should fear his return.

He uses the language of a caring mother by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, both fruits of the Spirit. He says, I entreat you, I beg you, I beg of you that when I'm present, I may not have to show this boldness.

And then he says, you know, there are some, on the other hand, it's kind of like you just wait until your apostolic father gets home.

[4 : 54] And Paul is saying to them, if they want to accuse me of a sinful life, don't you follow them. I'll deal with them personally. He uses sarcasm in verse 1 to quote their false accusations.

You know, let's look at it here. It says, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And then there's a slash in your text. I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I'm on

my way.

Those were the accusations that the false teachers were saying against him. They said his speech is unimpressive. They said he was in ministry for money, favors from women.

But they are basically saying that he's a joke. But the man of God can endure that kind of suffering without wanting to right the wrongs against him because he knows that the Lord is the avenger in all these things.

First they attack his teaching style, and then they attack his personal character. They're acting on self-interests and self-pervations.

[6 : 13] They push others down that they might climb. These types of people would never lay down their lives for the betterment of others. Like a father, if a hornet's nest was found in the kitchen and was attacking his children, he'd probably without thought lay on it until his children were safely out of harm.

And then swiftly do what was necessary to dispatch of the enemy. Paul's not so frustrated about their attacks on his credentials as he is about them undermining his sheep's confidence in the gospel and in his leadership and in Christ as head of the church.

And that's the enemy's goal, and Paul knows it. Later in this letter, he calls them servants of Satan and dispensers of demon doctrine.

They can't defeat his gospel, clearly, but they make the attempt to defeat his character and undermine his credibility.

Let's look at the preparation for battle. In verse 3, For though we walk in the flesh, we're not waging war according to the flesh.

[7 : 28] Paul's not meaning by that that we are walking according to the flesh or sinfully. He's meaning we walk in as humans, that we're human.

We have flesh. Same thing he meant in Galatians 2. This life I now live in the flesh, though I'm human, I live by faith in the Son of God. So though we're human, we're not waging war according to human thinking, human methods, or human means.

We're in the world, though we're not of the world. We have our boat in the water, but we don't want any water in the boat. But our boat needs to be in the water to float.

Paul goes from confronting the false accusations to say, we're waging war. Isn't that a tad excessive? Well, he has seen right through their sin to the heart of their sin, which was the enemy's desire and plan to usurp Jesus Christ's headship in his church and the sufficiency of Christ in the gospel.

So it's on. We're at war. Where does this combat take place? When the world assaults an individual Christian, it assaults the church.

[8 : 51] A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. It's a military term you may be familiar with. We come to church on Sunday, and we worship, and we minister to one another, and build each other up for the work of the ministry, as Dave said.

But Paul is talking about church discipline in this text against these false converts. But the point goes further than that. It applies to all conversations with all people who are against the true knowledge of God.

So I used to be a soldier in the army, and when we were in garrison, like on base, we wore garrison dress, shined up boots, cap badges were polished, shiny shirts, stiff colored.

And in the field, we wear combat boots. We go tactical. We go under light discipline. We use noise discipline. And to be certain, we do engage the enemy wherever we find the enemy, but we use different tactics depending on the situation.

And we need to be able to read the situation, just like Paul did, do a threat assessment. Not just for our own minds and sanctification, but for those of our spouses, our children, our friends, our elders, and speak with grace, like seasoned salt, as Peter said.

[10 : 23] Platelets. You know what platelets are? Platelets are in blood, and their role is, they're a clotting agent. The enemy is clandestine. He's surreptitious.

He wants your faith to bleed to death, not with a massive hemorrhage. He wants the body of Christ to bleed to death scratch by scratch. We need to act like platelets in the blood.

One small sign of a scratch and we all rush to the injury. And our purpose is healing, restoration, but we're working together for a common goal.

One pig and prick of gossip in the church and all Christians should rush to spread the love of Christ dwelling richly in us. Because what could one solo platelet do, after all? But our aim is the same, to destroy the ideas that mock God by rejecting Christ and his gospel.

And our outcome is the same, to take captive, not people, but take captive their ideas to the submission of God's word. Specifically, taking them captive to the obedience of Christ.

[11 : 35] And here again, we hear that notion that Paul continually uses that the gospel is a command. It's not a suggestion. 2 Thessalonians 1.8.

We can't wage war with human philosophy and expect to gain ground in a spiritual battle. If we think about that boat metaphor again, unbelievers are in the world, in their water, swimming around in oblivion as to their perilous predicament.

We can't expect them to want to climb into our boat. If we jump out of our boat and start treading water with them and commiserate with them by smiling and bobbing in the water, exchanging thoughts about the calmness and temperature and refreshing qualities of the water.

We need divine power. God's truth to contrast their certain fate in this water with the absolute safety and loveliness of the ark of our salvation, even Jesus Christ.

And throwing them a life jacket won't help either. because they'll die of exposure sickness from the hypothermia of rejecting Christ as Lord and Savior. Let's look at the power for battle.

[12 : 54] Verse 4. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. Let me start, first of all, by saying there are no volunteers in the army of the Lord.

Lord, we didn't choose Christ, he chooses us. Ephesians 1.4. Ephesians 1.4. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 2.5. But God, that's one of my favorite phrases in the whole Bible, but God, being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions.

Dead people don't respond. Hostile to God. He made us alive together with Christ. And then Ephesians 2.10.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them. So, BK's been taking you through the armor of God, and I've listened to a couple of those, and the sword of the spirit was sort of the summary of it all, the weapon.

[14 : 12] And so what does the sword of the spirit do? It's the deadliest weapon in the universe because it's divinely powerful for the destruction of strongholds or prisons, ideological fortresses where prisoners are kept.

But it's also a razor. It's also razor accurate beyond even the ability to separate bone from marrow without leaving any residue.

That's pretty impressive, clarity and accuracy. It's sharp enough to expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And we expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart by bringing the word of God to bear on the arguments of self-willed worldviews as they're energized by Satan.

And only the power of God in his word by his spirit can defeat them with the result being ultimately to bring them captive to the gospel to let God's word do what it says in 2 Corinthians 4.

God who commanded light shall shine forth from the darkness has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 30] He can command the dead heart to see divine truth and repent in faith coming to Christ by the power of his word not ours. The sword has been given to use but it is his power that flows through his word.

The gospel is the power of God not us unto salvation. Let's look at the plan and purpose for battle. Verse 5. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

There's the plan. And what for? To take every thought captive to obey Christ. That's the purpose. Paul knows who is the head of the church.

Jesus Christ. It's not a pastor. It's not a pope. It's not a guru or a spiritually enlightened individual or a super Christian who has a second blessing.

Or some new level knowledge revealed by spiritual voices. Paul says we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Not Paul. Look at those three words in verse 5.

[16:41] We destroy arguments every lofty opinion and take every thought. Arguments opinion thought these are the enemies not people per se.

Where do arguments opinions and thoughts take place? The mind is the battlefield. As a man thinks in his heart so is he. What's the difference between you and an unbeliever?

You might say grace. You might say love. You might say the Bible. Truth. Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Yes. But what does Paul call the power of God unto salvation to those who believe? the gospel. What's the difference between you and an unbeliever and me and an unbeliever? The gospel. If you are a new creation in Christ you heard the gospel and God changed your heart to respond in repentance and faith.

The unbeliever has he or she heard the gospel? You don't know. They might not know. And what's the best way to know if they have heard the gospel or not?

[17:57] Asking them is not the best way. Tell them. Tell them the gospel. They might believe a false gospel or they might be lying to avoid your evangelistic efforts or Bible thumping.

So notice that we don't kill the enemy. We take them captive. In verse 5 we take every thought captive. The enemy is already captive.

The Bible says that the fallen man is a slave to sin. And here we learn that ungodly ideas are prisons. Jesus was a preacher.

Do you remember his first sermon? He went to a very safe place where he would have thought or one would have think he would be supported and not criticized heavily.

But as soon as he unpacked the truth that he was the long-awaited Messiah predicted for centuries in the Old Testament, they could not see past his humanity and they rejected submission to this son of a carpenter in Nazareth.

[19:09] He was not just the messenger. He was the very message. And they would not turn from their trust of their religion to trust in Jesus of Nazareth to save them.

Jesus was asked to read in that very first sermon from Isaiah 61. It's a very familiar passage in the Old Testament on the Messiah. And it reads like this. And this, to me, begs the question, who is this referring to?

Who is bound in prisons and captive? Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians that the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God.

They're spiritually appraised and they're foolishness to him. And in Romans, Paul wrote that the natural man does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.

Let's just remember why man sees divine truth as foolish. In Romans 1, Paul wrote that this is God's wrath being revealed as they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

[20:35] They suppress the truth that suggests they know something about it. And there's enough revealed about God in creation so as to be without excuse for not believing that God exists.

It's only God who can deliver a person from God's wrath. wrath. And Ephesians 2 tells us all mankind is, by nature, children of wrath.

Let's look at Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2 reads like this. And you were dead in the trespasses and sin in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead, unresponsive in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

Beloved, there's only one power that can save you from God's curse in human depravity, and it is God himself. Put it another way, there's only one righteousness that satisfies God's perfect righteous requirements, and it is the very righteousness of God.

[22:03] And this is the message we need to tell every unbeliever that we can, because it's the only message that will save them from eternal punishment. And it is the duty and the privilege of every believer to do so.

There's only one way to escape God's wrath. There's only one way to take every argument, lofty opinion against the knowledge of God, and thought captive to obey Christ, and it is by the power of God's word.

Let's look at verse 6, and we'll see the patience, the patience in battle. Verse 6, being ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

Paul has just corrected a major issue in the Corinthian church, where they were accusing him of living a fleshly life in order to undermine his credibility as an apostle.

Now he shows them that he's patient for them to come to a right understanding of how and when to engage these false teachers, even amongst their own ranks. He's ready to take necessary steps with these wolves once the sheep have been given an opportunity to choose the truth.

[23 : 18] Paul says, godly leadership is patient toward believers. A godly elder can, like God, withstand personal assaults to protect the sheep he cares about until they have come to see the truth.

Imagine some people in church start gossiping, and then eventually running their mouths about the pastor and his allegedly sinful lifestyle, and how he was unqualified to preach.

Just imagine. You can only imagine. We're not to accept a charge against an elder except on the account of at least one or two or three truthful, credible witnesses.

witnesses. Now imagine this happened while he was away on ministry work. This text is telling us that the godly leadership of a church will punish the sinful deeds, but not in such a way as to hurt the sheep, but rather to build them up.

You can hear the righteous indignation. You can hear Paul's holy ire. Look at verse 6. Oh, I'm ready. I'm ready, believe me, to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

[24 : 45] It's not quite a conniption fit. He has self-control. He is uber protective. All good shepherds are jealous for their sheep.

Paul doesn't want to beat down those who had made a mistake in order to beat down false teachers. That would be like a carpet bombing, shock and awe campaign.

He says, I will both bring the truth of God to bear on them and give you time and grace to come to a right understanding. The problem with that swinging the hammer approach, which tends to be legalistic, is it's not Christ-like, for one.

And second, it's deleterious to the faith of those who are the weaker brother. We don't compromise truth ever, but we should be patient.

In chapter 13 of 2nd Corinthians, Paul writes, for this reason I write these things in this letter, while I am away from you, that when I come, I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

[26 : 06] God's word teaches us, as BK stated in December, that the best defense is a strong offense. We defeat the enemy by using the greatest weapon for this.

Paul doesn't call it spiritual struggle. He doesn't call it spiritual journey. He calls it war.

Because there are casualties. God takes no delight in the death of the wicked. Ezekiel 18. You know why? Because when a wicked man dies, his hope perishes with him.

Proverbs 11, 7. There is no hope for the unrepentant sinner to escape God's wrath apart from Christ. No hope apart from Christ.

Listen to Jesus' own words. Unless, unless, that's a universal conditional. Unless you believe that I am he, the Messiah, you will die in your sins.

[27 : 12] John 8. And Jesus promised to that same audience that all that the Father gives to me, all that will come to me as evidenced by repentance and following Christ, I will lose none of them.

And that they would be given everlasting life. No one can snatch them from his hand. In the PPCLI, the regiment that I served in, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, soldiers have a fire team partner.

It's a combat partner that's got your back, no matter what you're doing. You could be brushing your teeth and you still have a fire team partner. Or you could be in a trench under fire.

The enemy, James wrote, will flee from us. He cannot overcome the world. The word of the Lamb of God, he is our champion.

He's always with us in the trenches, in the firefights of sometimes belligerent conversations with post-modernists, feminists, atheists, religionists.

[28 : 26] Ists, istis. He's the ultimate fire team partner, Jesus Christ. And one day we're all going to lay down our arms at the feet of the Prince of Peace.

When he has obliterated the presence of sin forever. Hallelujah. I can't wait. When he wipes away all the tears and creates a new heaven and a new earth in which only righteousness dwells.

Because there will be no more need to fight that good fight of faith. We will enter into eternal rest. But to enter rest implies that you had been working.

And that's an emphasis in this passage from Paul. We need to be engaged. As Al Mohler says, we cannot be silent. And we have to be prepared.

Peter echoed this same idea when he wrote in 1 Peter 3. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

[29 : 37] Yet do it with gentleness and respect. Peter knew his Bible. All the apostles knew their Bible. People like that you want to be around. People like Spurgeon said, if you slice them open, they'll bleed bibline.

Paul told the Colossians to let the word of Christ dwell richly in you. Which, by the way, is a command. So why is such a focus on reading the Bible? BK's explained.

And the word of God explains. Without a weapon in your hand, you will be a liability to the mission, not an asset to the team. And it is a sword, okay?

But it is a sharp, two-edged sword that's sharper than any other weapon. One of my favorite titles for Christ is Lord of Hosts.

Hosts. It means he's the commander of the armies of heaven's angels. And we are on a mission for him. Before he departed this world, our Lord Jesus, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus gave the marching orders for those who would follow him.

[30 : 52] But he told us, or he told them at that time, to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit was given. We have, we who are in Christ, according to Romans 5, verse 5, have that same divine person living in us today, the Holy Spirit.

And we follow that same great commission today. Co-mission. We're on a co-mission. Mission together. We have our objective, too.

And what is it? To make more converts than the next guy and get status within the church as having the gift of evangelism? You've heard that before.

Well, that's not really my gift. Beloved, the gift is faith in Jesus Christ. And if you are a believer, you have that gift.

And you have a witness. And you are a witness. If you have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, you are a witness.

[31 : 56] And people, all people, are saved by hearing the truth concerning Christ. When I was in Yugoslavia in United Nations Protection Force mission in 1992, I was there for seven months.

And I had to lead a major retaliatory offense, an offensive mission, after one of our APCs was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade and sent my friend home bleeding and hanging on to life by a thread. I was 6'1 Alpha. Six means reconnaissance. One means the first section. And Alpha means the first detachment. So what does that mean? I'm the first carrier in the entire battle group leading this mission.

I was, I think, 21 years old. I was a tad nervous. So I'm driving this 13-ton tracked vehicle with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on top of it.

We drove down into this valley on the winter day. And I had the butterflies is an understatement.

[33 : 14] And doctors would call it zero stoma, dry mouth. And then we started going back up to the top of the valley where the objective was. And I paused my carrier and I looked back down into the valley.

And there was a ray of light, I know, situational irony, cracking through the clouds. And my breath was steamy. And I saw behind me 650 soldiers who were amongst the best trained soldiers in the world.

And I felt like there was nothing to fear. There was nothing at that objective that could threaten us with our might. And more importantly, our unity in that mission.

That's what our job is. It's together. You're not your own. 1 Corinthians 6. You may have heard that term.

You are not your own. 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19. You were bought with a price. That should not cause you to feel like, ah, really? It should feel like, really?

[34 : 28] I belong to Christ. I'm a possession of Jesus Christ. I'm owned by him. And how did that happen? Well, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may, why again?

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2, 9.

And in 1 Peter 1, the apostle wrote, knowing that you were not redeemed. Just to raise the stakes here.

You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers. But with precious blood, as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

You were purchased by the blood of Christ. For he was known, foreknown, before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you and me.

[35 : 41] The precious blood of the lamb has purchased you. It is a wonderful thing to be conscripted into the Lord's army by his irresistible grace.

He showed us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and gave us spiritual discernment to taste and see that the Lord is good. He's given us the privilege, the privilege of being his witnesses, even unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

But we do not do this alone. We wage war not as individual soldiers, but as a body of Christians, where every member is vitally important to its health.

We are united by the gift of God, who has given us a love of the truth so as to be saved. 2

Thessalonians 2.10. So I encourage us all that this year, we would continue to walk even more united in the work of the gospel.

That we would be even more courageous to do the work of destroying the error in the world with the truth of God. Because we're fighting the battle together for the cause of our champion, Jesus Christ, who is invincible.

[37 : 06] Let's pray.