

Spiritual Warfare

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] So 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verses 4 and 5, specifically these verses.

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.

Sometimes we tend to think of the Apostle Paul as somebody who was living in a condition where he was above feeling.

And that in whatever situation he was in, that he was kind of oblivious almost to any pressures or any hurt or any of these things.

Well, I don't believe that for one moment. And the reason sometimes that we think along these lines is because remember in Philippians he tells us that he had learned that in whatever situation that he was in, that he had learned to be content.

[1 : 06] But that contentment didn't shield him from experiencing sorrows and difficulties and trials, which he had more than a fair share of in life.

And Paul knew very clearly what suffering and pain was like. And I think Paul is making this very point in verse 3 because he is reminding the Corinthian believers that he is still walking, excuse me, walking in the flesh, for though we walk in the flesh, we're not waging war according to the flesh. But so Paul is aware that physically he is still walking in the flesh, although he makes it clear elsewhere that he's not walking after the flesh, but after the spirit and in the spirit and by the spirit, but he is still a physical body and he is still, as it were, in the flesh and he's walking according to that.

And that means that despite all the grace that Paul was received and was bestowed upon him, he knew what it was to suffer physically and mentally and emotionally and socially in the same way as you and I do.

And Paul, of course, felt hurt. You get this sense sometimes in his writings that he felt hurt by accusations that were levelled against him.

[2 : 39] And he was quite often trying to defend his apostolic authority. And here he is trying to defend himself against accusations that were made against him, that he lacked apostolic authority and that he lacked courage.

They were kind of saying, well, you talk a good game, but let's see you living in that way. So Paul is defending himself and proving to them that he is living exactly according to what he is saying.

And Paul, of course, in this letter or in this particular chapter, begins to focus in on the particular warfare that he and all Christians are fighting and that we are engaged in a warfare.

And that our strategy has always got to be by God's help and by divine power. And that we don't wage war according to the flesh.

We are still in the flesh. We are walking in the flesh because we are physical human beings. But we are walking in the spirit. Our Christian life is governed and motivated by the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 00] And if we try and engage with other people for the kingdom of Christ in the flesh, then we're doomed to failure.

Because Paul is highlighting that we're facing as Christians a world that absolutely hates Christ and hates a Christian.

And a world that has captivated all its inhabitants and that they are in fortresses and strongholds.

And that we are facing huge problems in this world that we are actually living in.

And so Paul faces up to these realities. And so he's highlighting that all these strongholds and these mighty, as it were, fortresses that people are living in.

And I think we're always very conscious of this, that when we're involved in, whether it's preaching or witnessing or any of these things, that only God can help us.

[5 : 08] And I think we're always very conscious of this. Now, I remember way back years, I don't know how many, 35, 36 years ago, the very first highways and byways mission that I went on to.

And I was probably very, very naive. And I had the feeling, because we were there as a group, we were resident there. And we had this sort of, it was a very prayerful, very spiritual and very exciting. And somehow you begin to think that as we go around the doors and meet with people, that there are people there behind these doors and they're all waiting to be converted. And that there's going to be a great reception.

But of course, we found the very opposite. That there was a, yes, there were some homes that were open, but most were totally apathetic and some were completely hostile.

And it was for myself as a young Christian, it was quite a sharp learning curve to realize that the people that you meet and the nicest people, but there's this inbuilt opposition to the Christian faith.

[6 : 19] And that's the sort of thing that the Apostle Paul is highlighting here. He talks about these strongholds. He says, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

And so that's where people are. And we've got to remember that, that every person outside Christ is in this, as it were, stronghold, stronghold in this fortress.

It's like a, like a castle. And they are, they have all these defenses against the gospel. And original sin has put the default position in every heart as opposition to God and his Christ.

And I don't think we realize the depth of that opposition and the enmity of that opposition. Because very often, I suppose, for the majority of us, we have been born and brought up within the Christian faith.

Born and brought up in a Christian home. Maybe not all of us in here, but meeting here tonight, but I'm sure the majority have. And so there is a groundwork going on within us and a sensitivity and maybe a siding with the gospel because of that.

[7 : 43] But even despite that, our hearts were still at enmity with the Lord. But for those who don't have any siding or sympathy with the gospel, even although they might be the nicest people in the world, they are in these strongholds and these fortresses that are utterly and absolutely opposed to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's an inbuilt prejudice against the gospel, against the Christian that is within people's hearts.

And we can see it. We can see it all throughout the nation. And there's this straight away.

There's you can see if there's any group of people that are marginalized or ridiculed or unfairly characterized.

It's a Christian. And you often say to yourself, this is so unfair. Because when you think of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing in this world to compare to any philosophy or way of life that is seeking to promote well-being, to promote hope and peace and love and joy.

And that's the very things that this world is crying out for. And the things the world is crying out for is available in Christ. And the Christian is somebody who's seeking to live that lifestyle.

[9 : 14] And yet the world hates. The world is opposed to. And so this shows us how twisted sin actually is. That it calls good evil and evil good.

And we shouldn't be surprised that the Christian is so maligned and so opposed. Because we just have to look at our Lord and look at his life and look at what he suffered.

And he was wherever he went, although it tells us that they heard him gladly and great crowds followed. And there were many people who rejoiced in the life of Jesus while he was here in this world.

But so many hated him and opposed him. And they spoke. They falsely accused him. And there was so much slander about him. And the envy against him was incredible.

And we know what eventually happened or how he was taken and falsely accused and put to death. So if this is what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought not to be surprised at what happens to us.

[10 : 21] And so there's this natural inclination that goes against the Christian. I remember years and years ago in one place where I was working, not in my teaching life, but in one place I was working.

And a Christian, I wasn't a Christian at the time, but a Christian came to work there. I remember this person when they heard that this individual was a Christian. They were virtually spitting fire. There was just this anger that a Christian is coming. They were almost spitting it with a venom. And I thought, whoa, but that is showing what some people are like within their own, just their hatred towards Christ.

And again, when you think of all the religious systems in this world and all the creeds and the philosophies that are opposed to God. And when you think of, just for instance, take Marxism or communism.

And you think of all the people in this world who are under that influence and power. There are millions and millions and millions of people. And at the very heart of their philosophy is there is no God.

[11 : 31] And they drum into their people. There is no God. And so these forces are raised up against God. These are the great strongholds, the great fortresses.

But you look at all the different, whether you go into humanism or secularism or paganism. And even when you go into the spirituality of this world, there are so many strands of what people, they say, oh, I believe in God.

But they look on God as a force that's within you, that you find your own God, that God is at the center, you are God. And so there's so many warped and strange ideas.

And then, of course, the natural self-righteousness of the heart is opposed to God. Because we make ourselves right in our own eyes. And we believe that God must accept us because of who we are and what we are.

And so the apostle Paul knows. He knows all that. And that's really what he's telling us. That we are in a warfare and that we have got to realize that in our work as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what we're facing.

[12 : 44] That we're facing a world that is at war with us. And so Paul realizes that great intellect or great academic ability or the great powers of reasoning, while these are very useful, in and of themselves will never persuade anybody of the truth.

That it is only divine power and divine power alone that can change a person's life. And that's what the gospel is. You know, if there wasn't a second part to this, it would be very discouraging.

But Paul isn't writing in order to discourage us. He is writing in order that we will be realistic. And to realize that this world is in the grip of the God of this world, who has blinded the minds of those who don't believe.

But Paul elsewhere tells us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. And as we know and as often said, that word power comes from the word dynamite.

And we know what dynamite does. Dynamite blows apart. It bursts open. And that's what the gospel does. It blows apart this resistance and this iron will that is set against the gospel.

[14 : 16] And this enmity that is determined not to receive Jesus Christ. And so when the gospel is, when God's power touches a person's life, this power alone changes.

So that the lion becomes a lamb. And the darkness gives way to light. And being held in bondage of chains of bondage into sin and to slavery, these chains are snapped off us.

And we experience freedom and the wonder of the release of the power of Jesus into our lives. And we ourselves are living testimony of that power.

Because every single one of us who are here tonight, tuning in here, who have been set free by the power of Christ, know the reality of that power.

And only a miracle can do it. You know, people say today, oh, there are no miracles. But you're a miracle. But you're a miracle. And I'm a miracle. The very fact that we have been saved. That there was a day that we were at enmity with Christ.

[15 : 29] A day we didn't want to know him. Or be one with him. Or one with his people. But that all changed. So that now we want to be with the people of God.

We want to be like Christ. We want to be with Christ. We love his word. We love his day. We love his cause. We long for the return of Christ.

If tonight we were told Jesus is coming, we would rejoice. We wouldn't be like those who would be calling on the mountains and the hills to hide us. We'd be saying, even so, come Lord Jesus.

And that is because of this miraculous, radical power that has so changed our lives. And so, as we said, no one and nothing can deliver us but the Lord alone.

And so the apostle is looking at the gospel as warfare. And Paul, of course, often uses the illustration from the field of athletics and the field of battle, of warfare.

[16:31] And we know that the Christian life is one of activity. Its main activity, I would say, is walking.

So often, when you go through the Bible, you will find so many references to walking with God. And it's a beautiful picture. The only time, really, we find the Christian being not moving at all is when we're told to stand still.

There are times when we have to be still. But even there, we're to be still and to know that you are God. But most of the time, we are told to be running and to be pushing and to be striving and to be fighting and to be wrestling.

And so there's this idea of conflict, of this pushing all the time. And the language that Paul is using here is all language of battle. For the weapons, he says, of our warfare are not of the flesh but of divine power.

To destroy strongholds. To destroy arguments. To take every thought into captivity. And so Paul is at war with the forces of darkness.

[17:43] And you know, the beautiful thing, this is a great example Paul gives us. Nobody believed in the sovereignty of God. And the divine power of God to come and to save like the Apostle Paul.

But that didn't, for one moment, have Paul sit down and think, Well, if God is going to save someone, he will save them. And if God is not going to save, he won't.

And so there's nothing I can do. No. Paul went, travelled the world. He went all around Europe. He went from one city to another.

And everywhere he went, he reasoned and he preached and he taught and he witnessed. Because he knew that as he did this and as he relied upon the power of God, this is a way that God has chosen to wage war against the world and to bring his people in.

And this is what he's done for us. He has saved us. And as he has saved us, he has now sent us out to do likewise. And I know today, these days are very restrictive.

[18:57] But our lives, once we've come to faith in Jesus Christ, are to be lived for the Lord. And this is what we have to do every day. Say, Lord, may I be a living epistle.

A living epistle with a mouth that is read by people, read well and read to your glory, but also that I'll be able to speak well.

So we would ask the Lord, Lord, when there is an opportunity given to me, please give me the words to say. May your power accompany my words.

And every day we have to ask the Lord, Lord, help me to live as a Christian. Help me to live according to your word. Because I think you and I know that a good Christian witness is incredibly powerful.

And I'm sure we look back over our lives and there have been men and women along the way, even before ever we became Christians. And their lives touched us.

[20:00] We were affected by them. There was a winsomeness about we were kind of drawn by them. And we saw something almost otherworldly, something that we knew that really identified them.

And that is a powerful witness. So that people will hear and people will see Christ. But our dependence is never upon who we are ourselves or what we say.

But our dependence must always be upon the Lord. And we need to ask the Lord for the faith to believe. Because as we say, if we just looked at the fortresses and the strongholds and these things, very easy to become depressed and say, oh, what's the point?

But never at any point did the apostle think that way. And neither should we. But that we will see that God is ingathering his people. And that in the most amazing way that he's using every single one of us, where we are, to do our own wee bit for the growth of the kingdom.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for your word and for the way it deals with the realities of life. We give thanks, Lord, for the life of the apostle Paul.

[21:17] And we give thanks for his willingness to suffer for your sake. We give thanks, Lord, for how amazing his life was. How you used it in such a spectacular way.

Where he was able to testify of you at the very highest places in the land. And also even in prison. And he knew that wherever he ended up, that it was for the furtherance of the gospel.

Help us to have that insight as well. And to realize that sometimes even in the lockdowns, that it is for the furtherance of the gospel. And we give thanks just as our brothers were praying tonight to say they were so aware just of the power of your spirit.

And of the way that you are working even in this lockdown. And so we pray that you will indeed work mightily. And that afterwards we'll be able to see, well, truly the Lord, the Lord.

Well, we know that you're always ahead. But that we may see it. And be able to rejoice. And that many will rejoice. With many souls coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

[22 : 26] And so be with us tonight. And bless all who are in need. Bless those who are anxious. Those who are worried. Those whose hearts are really down. Pray, Lord, for people who are struggling.

Whether it is financially or emotionally or socially or in whatever particular way. We pray for those who are unwell. We commit them to your care.

And again for those who are bereaved. Watch over us and take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.