

# Spiritual Warfare

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Preacher: Treg Hallman

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. It's my privilege this morning to preach out of the book 2 Corinthians. So I would ask you if you would open with me to chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians. Our main passage this morning will be verses, chapter 10, verse 3 through 6, but I wanted to start this morning in verse 1 so you get a bit of the context here.

This is Paul speaking to the church at Corinth in reference to his ministry. And so if you will, in honor of God's Word, stand with me as we read this passage this morning.

Verse 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 towards you when I am away, 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.

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.

[ 1 : 3 6 ] 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.

Let me pray. Father, I pray that you would empower the preaching of your Word this morning. Father, if there's anything from me, I pray that it would wash away. But Father, I pray that you would cause your Word to bear fruit.

And Father, I pray that you would open our hearts to hear and receive what you have for us this morning. I pray in your name. Amen. Y'all can have a seat. You know, my story, my spiritual story, just a little portion of it is this, is that I grew up in church.

From the time I was a baby, an infant, I've been in the church that whole time. And yet, I was shocked when at 22 years old, someone shared with me the gospel.

Now, surely somewhere along the line I'd heard about Jesus. Surely somewhere along the line I had heard someone say that He died on the cross in order to save us from our sins, that He was God's Son.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] Surely somewhere along the way I'd heard it. But I'd not understood it. And so I had a lady by God's providence share the gospel with me, and she started with my sin.

And she asked me if I thought that I was a sinner. And because I had a balance scale that had, in my mind, more morality than it had evil, I didn't think I was lost.

I didn't think I was a sinner. And I answered, no, I don't see myself as a sinner. And yet, by God's grace, He showed me the truth.

She asked me a question about pride. And I answered, yeah, I'm proud of all the trophies I have lying in my room and all the successes and things that I've accomplished.

I said, yes, ma'am, I am proud of that. She said, no, no, no, that's not what I mean. Let me read a couple of verses to you. So she read a couple of verses out of Scripture that have to do with pride that goes before a fall, how God hates the proud and loves the humble.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] And by the grace of God, He opened my eyes to see that my sin was much deeper than I ever thought. In my pride, I thought I had achieved my own salvation.

And that day, I saw my sin in a way that I'd never understood it before. And how is it possible that a guy who'd been all those years in church, who had heard whatever was preached, I can't remember, how is it that I'd heard it, I'd been around it, and yet I'd never understood it?

You know, I would say the reason is because of the war. The war we see in this passage this morning. And I would turn your eyes to verse 3 and 4.

And I think you will notice this morning as we read this passage that this is military language. Paul is using this military language to illustrate the reality of a war that we find ourselves in. You know, it's not a physical war that he's referring to as a spiritual war. And so Paul says this to those who would claim that he's operating in the flesh, that he's walking according to the flesh, that his ministry was according to the flesh.

[ 5 : 31 ] He says, no, no, no, that is not true. He says, though we walk in the flesh, though we're humans just like you, though we have temptations that we fall to just like you, though we are like you in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh.

And it begs the question, Paul, what are you talking about a war? What war are you in? And I would say this, that it's not a physical war that he refers to.

He's using this as an illustration to the church at Corinth. And you know, Corinth would understand what he's talking about. Perhaps the reason he shared this, there's no way to know, is that he would refer back to a war that happened, the Corinthian War in roughly 397 B.C., where their strongholds were destroyed, many of them, where they were in an intense battle for a period of time.

Whether Paul had that in mind or not, the illustration stands strong and allows us to see some insight into this war that we have against our enemy, our arch enemy, the devil, Satan, and his kingdom, the dark kingdom.

So Paul says, yes, we walk in the flesh, but we don't war with human wisdom. We don't use human techniques. We war in a different way.

[ 7 : 06 ] We don't war according to the way men war. He goes on to say, the weapons of our warfare are not this, but this. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but they're this, they're divine.

We wage war not in our own strength, but we rely on the strength of another. Christian, you and I would see what he's talking about.

We rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit in this war. Paul relied on the strength of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, when Paul was talking about ministry with them and reminding them of when he came to Corinth with the gospel message, you understand that the gospel was not prevalent.

In this region of the world, that Paul in his missionary journeys was taking the gospel to those who didn't understand salvation, to those who didn't understand their sin and their separation from God, to those who didn't know why Jesus came and maybe had never heard the name of Jesus the Messiah before.

And Paul says this to the Corinthians. He says, And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

[ 8 : 40 ] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my speech and my message were not with enticing words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Paul was not trying to use wisdom and clever words to share with them the need of Christ.

He says He came to them with this simple message, the message of the gospel. The message of their sin and their separation, their need for a Savior.

Looking back at the passage in 2 Corinthians, he says this, The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

This morning, I want to look at this passage from two different angles, from two different perspectives. When we talk about war, we talk about often one entity or one nation or one person or one group against another.

[ 10 : 05 ] And in this war, it's the same. We talk about those who are in war against the enemy, that is Satan. Paul says that he's in war.

He says our warfare, our fight against the dark kingdom is not something that can be accomplished with human ability. I want to look first from the perspective of Satan, from the perspective of the dark kingdom.

And I think it would be helpful for us to look at another passage. And that passage is a common, familiar passage probably to most of y'all. It's Ephesians chapter 6.

Paul, again, is sharing with the church at Ephesus about this battle, this war, this real spiritual conflict that touches all of us.

You can turn there if you like. No need to turn there for sake of time. Chapter 6 says this. He's talking to the church, Christians. He says, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

[ 11 : 14 ] And I would note here, he's not telling them to be strong in their own power, their own ability, their own wisdom, their own strength. He's saying be strong in the Lord.

There is a means by which we fight that's not our own ability. There's a means by which we fight this war that is spiritual. He goes on to say, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

Do you know that the devil has schemes? You know what Satan is planning? I don't think any of us really know all the details, but we can get the general outline by reading Scripture.

From Satan's perspective, what he's attempting to do in the lives of those who don't know Christ, like me when I was young and all those years, 20-something years in church, he's attempting to do what he shares in 2 Corinthians 4.

It says this. It says, the God of this world, i.e. Satan, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

[ 12 : 30 ] He's blinded the minds of unbelievers. What is the methodology of Satan? His methodology is to blind the eyes of those who don't understand, who don't know, who don't recognize their sin, their separation, their need for a Savior.

He said he's blinded the minds of unbelievers, not the eyes. I want us to see he's blinding the mind of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of what?

The gospel of the glory of God. What does Satan do in the lives of those who are not in the kingdom? You know what he does? He blinds them. He doesn't want them to hear the gospel message.

He doesn't want it to hear it in their ears and he doesn't want them specifically to hear it in their heart. How is he going to accomplish that? How does he blind? Well, we turn back to chapter 10, our passage this morning.

How does he blind? The eyes of those who don't know Jesus, who don't understand the gospel message. Here's an interesting look in our passage this morning.

[ 13 : 42 ] He establishes, Satan establishes strongholds in their life. So we look at this military language and we envision a walled city, a stronghold. So when someone comes to fight against a stronghold, they come up against a fortress, a walled city.

And how is it we're going to take that walled city? With great difficulty, correct? In this case, the illustration Paul is trying to represent here is this, is that Satan causes people to believe lies. He establishes a thought process in their mind that keeps them from hearing and understanding the word of God. Look at the next verse, if you will. Paul explains a little further what these strongholds are.

He says, we, that is those of us who minister the gospel, those of us that are taking the gospel to the lost world, to the places that have never heard it before. We destroy arguments and lofty opinions.

A way of thinking that's not biblical, a way of thinking that's not true. It's based on lies. It's based on fallacies. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

[ 15 : 03 ] You know what Satan would say? There is no God. Are you kidding? And God's good anyway. God will forgive you all. All of you will be in heaven. You're fine. You don't have to worry about that.

Just live life. There's probably hundreds and hundreds of angles that Satan uses to propagate the lies and establish the stronghold in our lives.

It's like a fortress. They hear the gospel like I heard the gospel and it just goes right over. They don't really hear it. They don't understand it. And Satan wants to build up these strongholds of lies in the minds of unbelievers.

But what does Satan do with Christians? Do you realize that all of us were in that condition?

That all of us were lost? That all of us were unbelievers? That all of us were separated from God? But by the grace of God and His mercy, we have received salvation.

[16:11] Many of us have come to know our need for a Savior. Many of us have seen our own sin by the grace of God. What did He do? He illuminated our understanding. So all those years, 22 years I'm living, I didn't see my sin for what it really was.

I didn't think I was separated from God. I thought for sure I was in the kingdom. When God opened my eyes to see the depth of my sin and the reality that my sin had caused me to be separated from God, I was absolutely shocked.

blown away that I wasn't a Christian. How did that happen? You know, all of us are there.

Do you realize all of us have a misunderstanding about who we really are? We have a misunderstanding. We don't really understand our separation from God. We don't really understand His holiness. Why?

It's because all this stronghold of lies, this stronghold of belief that's not according to truth is where we've lived. And by the grace of God, He's shined His light.

[17:17] What is the light? It's the gospel. It's the truth. He's shined the light. You know what happens when lies are exposed to truth? Poof, they're gone. It exposes the lies.

This lie that I'm good, in good standing with God, when the truth came and I saw my sin, I realized that was a lie. The Holy Spirit illuminated my understanding, opened my eyes that I might see that I really, truly was separated from God.

And you know what I did? I bowed my knee in a third floor room in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a place I'd never been in my life, the house of someone I'd never met in all my life.

By the grace of God, I got on my knee, I said, God, forgive me. I didn't know I was a sinner. I didn't know, at least I didn't know you saw me as a sinner.

Yeah, I had these secrets that I didn't want anybody to know about during my life. But I didn't realize I didn't, I wasn't in the kingdom. I didn't realize I wasn't going to heaven. I didn't realize I wasn't your child. I didn't realize that I wasn't forgiven.

[18:20] I didn't realize God. By the grace of God, he opened our eyes to see. You know, Satan doesn't want your eyes to be opened. But some of us are in the kingdom now. You know the call to the church?

He says, go. All authority, Jesus says, all authority is given to me. Now go and proclaim my gospel and teach them. Baptize them and teach them to obey everything that I've commanded you.

Take the gospel to the far corners of the earth. Start in your neighborhood. Start in your town.

Wherever I lead you, go and take the gospel.

with you. And what's the impact going to be? You know, Satan can't stop the spread of the gospel.

You know why? Because the gospel exposes a lie. Satan's method is what?

To establish strongholds, arguments, lofty opinions, philosophies that are not according to truth.

And you know, we by nature grab them and believe. What does it take for the lies to be exposed?

[19:25] The light of the gospel. The light of God's word. You know what they don't need? They don't need all these fancy arguments. You know what Paul said? I just read it. He says, I decided to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

You know what someone who's not in the kingdom needs to hear? The gospel. You know the call of God to Christians? Take the gospel. How does Satan fight against you and me?

You know what he uses the same way? I go back to Ephesians, this parallel passage, and I want you to listen to what Satan uses against Christians.

So, he's talking to Christians here in Ephesians 6. He's talking to the Christians in Ephesus. And he's saying to them, fight. He said in chapter 5, walk in love.

He says, walk not as unwise, but wise. Christian, you are called to live in a way that is in accordance with wisdom and with humility and with love.

[20:33] And he's saying to them that there's a battle. And you're not going to be very effective in this battle and this war unless you understand how it's fought. So, if I ask you a question right now, church, do you know how to fight this battle?

Do you know how to be successful in this war? Listen, it's, when you're talking to people that are not in the kingdom, that's one thing, but when it's happening in your own heart and your own life, how do you fight?

How do you stand? Listen to the word here. He says, put on the whole armor of God. I'm not thirsty, I really am not. And I think Jonathan's had his lips on that one, so I'm not going to, I'm not going to drink that one.

So, he says, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. What are schemes? Do you know? Listen, how are we going to fight against the dark kingdom if we don't know the schemes?

Do you know the schemes? Do you know what Satan does? Do you know his methodology? We would turn to many, many passages and here's what we'd see. You know, Satan is a tempter.

[ 21 : 47 ] He's going to tempt you to dishonor God. He's going to tempt you to walk in sin. He's going to tempt you to pursue the flesh. And what is the flesh? We turn to Galatians 5.

I'm not going to turn there, but it's sexual promiscuity. It's anger. It's wrath.

It's sorcery. It's chasing after things of this world, flesh, self. You can read Galatians 5 later. You can read Romans 10 later and you'll see what the Word says about walking after the flesh.

But the call of God to His children is to walk according to the Spirit, to walk in step with the Spirit, that the fruit of the Spirit might be evident in our life. So here we go. The schemes of the devil.

Deception.

He wants to propagate lies. Do you think that Satan still lies to you and me as Christians? Do you think he throws lies our way? How do you handle it? Remember, what is it that causes lies to disappear, to be broken, to be shattered?

[ 22 : 55 ] It's truth. How do you war when all these lies come into your ears? How do you war? You war with truth. How often do you hear untruths, lies that come to you and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's not right.

No, no, no, no. How often does the Word of God come up in your mind and you say, no, no, no, no. I don't believe that. I don't accept that. I reject that. That's not true. Deception. Temptation.

He wants you to be on the sideline in this war, in this battle, in this mission that he's called us to, to take the gospel to the lost and dying world. He doesn't want you to be effective.

And how is it he's going to keep you, Christian, from being effective? He's going to cause you to live in sin, to live in lies. The temptations are going to draw you away from God's honor and God's call in your life.

And he's going to accuse you. Three things. Temptation, deception, and accusation are the main methodologies of Satan against the church, against Christians.

[ 23 : 58 ] Revelation chapter 12, it's a story and it talks about a dragon and it talks about a woman and it talks about a child.

And it's, in this story in chapter 12, the dragon is Satan and the child is a church and the, excuse me, the woman is a church and the child is Jesus. And you can read the story but the end of the story is very revealing in verse 17, the last verse in chapter 12 of Revelation.

It says this, Then the dragon, that is Satan, became furious with the woman, that's the church, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring. Satan, the dragon, went off to make war with the rest of her offspring.

Who are offspring? Those who keep the commands of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Church, let me just say, whether you're aware of it or not, there is a war that's going on and you as a Christian are in the middle of it.

And Satan is after you. But greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Amen? Greater is the Holy Spirit, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

[ 25 : 22 ] Satan doesn't stand a chance when truth exposes the lies. You know, we don't fight in human ways. If we fought in human ways, we might be full of fear.

We don't fight in human ways. Ephesians 6 says this, We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

You know, we are in a genuine battle with the satanic kingdom, with the demonic world. And he says, therefore, take up the whole armor of God.

Don't take up your own strength, your own wisdom, your own ability. Take up the armor of God.

Why? That you may be able to withstand an evil day and to stand firm. And the call is this, is then take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert in this battle. You know, Satan desires to devour. Satan, like a roaring lion, is seeking whom he may devour.

[ 26 : 37 ] You know he's after Christians? Back to our passage. The perspective of Satan is to destroy, to kill.

I want to look at it from a different perspective. That's the perspective of Paul. You know what Paul sees here? He sees people that hadn't yet heard the gospel, that hadn't come into the kingdom. And what is he doing? He is going. As God has instructed him to go, he's going. He's taking the gospel to the lost and dying world. And what does he understand? That the enemy has sold them this lie and they've latched onto it and they believe it.

And so what does he take as he goes to the lost and dying world? He takes the gospel. He takes the gospel. He takes the truth of God's word and he destroys the arguments and the lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

How does he do that with the truth? What does the truth do? It exposes lies. Church, you know when we're sharing the gospel, what are we sharing? We're not sharing our opinion, our thoughts. We're sharing God's word.

[ 27 : 48 ] It's needful for us to know God's word that we, like Paul, would see this battle that the battle is against the light. The real true battle is Satan in the dark kingdom against the kingdom of light.

And who's a part of the kingdom of light? Us, Christians. Do you think God can destroy Satan with a word of his mouth? You think he can destroy him right now, just boom, he's done? You bet he can. But by God's providence, he's allowed you and me to be involved in this eternal thing, this taking of the gospel to the nations. It's our great privilege to do it and that he would use us in this call of ministry, of what he's doing in the lives of people.

I love the verse here. It says, he's destroying strongholds. Paul, as he's looking at those who aren't in the kingdom, destroying strongholds, these arguments, these lies that are not according to truth. And how's he doing? He's taking the truth, the gospel to them so they might understand and taking captive every thought. So have y'all ever tried to do that? In this battle against the dark kingdom, do you take account of your thoughts?

[ 29 : 05 ] Do you know how this battle is fought? Again, I ask the question, how is this battle fought? It's a fault against the lies. The truth is what exposes them. You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

And we'll end on this as Paul's perspective to fellow believers. So Paul's perspective to those who aren't in the kingdom, take the truth, share the truth, help them to understand the truth, expose the lies, and it isn't going to happen without the power of God.

And to the Christians, he says this, if you sneak over in chapter 11, verse 3, it says this, as Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church, he says this, but I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from the sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

When I was younger, I played a lot of golf. I still play a little bit. My heart, my goal at the time, as sinful as it was, to be really, really good at golf.

And briefly, I would say this, that the challenge in golf is not learning how to swing real well. There's a lot of people that swing well. And if you do it a million times and you duplicate it a million times, the ball tends to go where it's supposed to go.

[ 30 : 25 ] You know, the challenge is this, is when I get up on the tee box and I look at the problems, the trap, and the pond, and the out-of-bounds. I don't know if y'all play golf and know what those things are, but I'm hitting a golf ball and I'm trying to keep it on the grass, okay?

I don't want it to go on those other things because there's penalties involved. Do you know the difficulty is not in being able to hit it? Because I can go on the range during practice and I can just hit them just boom, boom, boom, boom.

Straight, long, make them curve this way, that way could do a lot, but when I get up on the tee, you know what the problem is? This. The mind is the problem.

I get up and I'm looking, I'm here, I'm like, all right, there's a pond over there. The problem is my mind is focusing on those things, focusing on the problems, focusing on the danger, and my body is not able to do what it should do.

You know the hard thing about golf? You see it in the pros too. If you watch any golf on TV, especially in majors, and the pros are getting close last day, they're near or on top of the leaderboard, near the top of the leaderboard, and what happens?

[ 31 : 29 ] You see these guys that are doing it for a living that are incredible golfers, and what happens? They fold. Why? Because there's a battle going on in the mind. It is difficult to remain focused when I'm trying to play golf.

Let me just say, church, you know the battle, the spiritual battles in the mind? You know what Satan is going to do to you and me? He's going to tempt us. He's going to accuse us. He's going to deceive us so that we are on the sidelines.

And Paul says to them, he says, I'm worried that your thoughts will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Are we willing to take every thought captive? That's the call, church, that we would take every thought captive and make it obedience to Christ, that we would walk in obedience to Him.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word. Lord, we confess that Father, we're weak.

In many ways, we're weak in that we can be deceived by the enemy. We can believe lies. Father, many times, we're weak because we give in to temptations and the lust of this world. God, and in a sense, we're sidelined.

[ 32 : 50 ] Father, I'm grateful, like Jonathan mentioned earlier, is that Father, You say that You're faithful and just to forgive us of our sins if we will confess to You.

So Father, I pray that You would help us to live a life of confession because truly, God, we are weak. We're so weak, Father. We try to walk in our own strength. I pray that You would teach us to walk in Your strength, that we would not be sidelined with these sins that we allow in our life.

God, that You would give us strength to be faithful to You. And God, I pray that You would empower Your Word so that many people would come into the kingdom. God, take us, Your church, I should say, send us, God, Your church, to people that we come in contact with with the gospel message that they need to hear the gospel, Father, so their ears could be opened, they would not be blind, God, I pray that You would use us in Your kingdom.

I pray in Your name. Amen.