

# We're Not Properly Engaged in Spiritual Warfare

Confession # 15

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Text: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 10. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church". And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ.

Today's confession is this: "We've Not Understood Spiritual Warfare". We live in a day when pastors and churches are confused about how to build Christ's church and how to cultivate lasting change in broken people.

This is probably the best known text on spiritual warfare in terms of the specific engagement of warfare.

## I. The **Mindset** of our warfare (vs. 1-2).

Have you ever been wronged? Have you ever been taken off guard spiritually? Have you ever felt under spiritual attack? Have you ever tried to help someone who needed major help spiritually? You might be in serious trouble this morning, and you need to know how to deal with people who are need help or are affecting you in a negative way. How do we approach this spiritual warfare?

- A. We must engage people with **compassion** (vs. 1), "I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!"

Paul was being *severely criticized* for his compassion. They said, he's as bold as a lion when he's got a pen, but face to face, he's humble and cowardly.

Humility was not a virtue to the Greeks in Paul's day. R. Kent Hughes put it this way:

"[T]hey regarded humility not as a grace but as a weakness. Apparently, they were influenced by the classical Greek tradition that regarded great men as anything but humble. In fact, classic literature couples meekness and humility with servility, which stands opposite to nobility and dignity".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians : Power in weakness*. Preaching the Word (181). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

Paul was being criticized as “soft” because of his compassion. ***You must take that risk this morning.*** Why?

In **Matthew 11:29** (ESV), Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”.

- Parents, you need to know that compassion is the way into your child’s hard heart.
- When you are at work, compassion is the way into your co-workers heart.

Even when you are being filleted alive by criticism and you are being wronged, you must have compassion. Remember the words of Jesus as He is hanging crucified on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Regardless of the criticism, we should entreat people “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (vs. 1).

As we engage people, we are in a battle. But you must not come across as a know it all. When the heat goes up you must not come across harsh and with a debating spirit. You must have the gentleness and meekness of Christ.

You know what meekness is don’t you? It is strength under control. The Word Study Book of the NT (Zodhiates) describes it this way: “it is a condition of mind and heart which demonstrates gentleness, not in weakness, but in power. It is a balance born in strength of character”<sup>2</sup> and self control.

**Illustration:** Jesus is both a lion and a lamb. When we approach people, we must have a gentle and meek spirit. It is a spirit of deep and genuine compassion.

Consider **Numbers 12:3** (ESV) — “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.”

Here was a man who heard all the complaints of Israel, and he didn’t lash out at them. Once God tested Moses and said he would destroy Israel for their idolatry and raise up a new seed from Moses. But Moses with compassion and meekness pleaded with God. The people raised up a golden calf and were calling Aaron to go back to Egypt. Moses interceded for them, and God had mercy on them.

**Quote:** Someone said, **“In leadership, you have to have thick skin and a tender heart”**. Don’t ever let people get on your nerves so much that you don’t genuinely love them with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, even in the face of harsh criticism.

B. We engage people with **courage** (vs. 2), “I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness [courageousness] with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.”

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<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

### **Definition of “boldness”: Daring, Courageous**

Paul says his attitude in spiritual warfare has to be with great “boldness” at times. He says, “I beg you” essentially to repent before I come, otherwise I am going to hold you accountable in a very bold way.

- The word “boldness” means “to be daring.” It means “to act without fear regardless of consequences.” It's literally “to abandon yourself without regard for personal safety, to disregard any personal safety or preservation.”

### **Wolves in the church**

Now against whom will this daring bold fearless battle be waged? There were wolves in the church. He says, “against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.”

War is a last resort to Paul. Paul was being accused of “walking according to the flesh”. The flesh is unredeemed humanness, it is synonymous with sinful desire, living life in order to please self. They were saying he was walking this way, it was his manner of life. The false teachers were spreading lies that Paul was corrupt, greedy, only in it for the money and position.

Paul did not want to come with guns blazing, but he was ready if he needed to be. He was coming after some – these false teachers who were spreading lies so they could have their following and teach their false doctrines.

### **Application:**

- We've got to be ready to speak the truth clearly, boldly, and *courageously*.
- Are you versed enough in the Word of God to do that? Are you in the Word? Are you getting convicted yourself?
- Often we are not used as a powerful catalyst in spiritual warfare, because we will not be courageous enough to get involved in someone's life and speak truth to them. In Gospel ministry, you need to be able “to speak the truth in love”. Yes, you need to be kind, but you must be able to **confront** with the truth.
- Is there someone you need to speak with today, but you've been putting it off?

## **II. The Machinery of our warfare** (vs. 3-4).

**2 Corinthians 10:3-4** (ESV) — “3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”

A. We need **divine** weapons.

Paul uses a play on words in which he moves from the moral to the physical. He's been accused of walking in a sinful fleshly way, but then he says, “though we walk in the flesh”. What's he saying? He's simply saying “I'm human”. He denies the accusation that he is corrupt, but he agrees with the reality that he is human.

Paul does not have the ability in himself to destroy what needs to be destroyed to bring this church back to spiritual health. He's only human, but his weapons are NOT human. His

weapons are ones of “divine power” that can pull down and “destroy strongholds”. We are human but we don't use human weapons. We are at war.

- Paul says in **Ephesians 6:12** (ESV) — “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”
- He says in **2 Timothy 2:3** (KJV) — “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”.

B. Human weapons have **no effect** on the souls of people.

Human weapons have no effect. Human weapons cannot fight against the kingdom of darkness. Human weapons cannot deal with principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places. Human weapons cannot transform sinners. Human weapons cannot sanctify saints. They have no effect in the spiritual realm, no effect on the kingdom of darkness, no effect on Satan, no effect on his supernatural systems. Human weapons have no effect on Satan's demonic doctrine and no effect on the eternal souls of men.

We cannot fight with human ingenuity. He would not fight with clever methodology. He would not fight with technology. This is a war on another level.

C. What are these human, **fleshly** weapons?

What are we talking about here? What are the weapons of the world? What are the weapons of the flesh?

- Setting aside the principles of the Word of God for **human ideas** and philosophies
- Replacing God's plans with **human plans and strategies**
- Replacing prayer with **organization**
- Replacing godliness and humility with skill, eloquence, personality and cleverness
- Replacing true preaching with **entertainment** and religious showmanship
- Replacing the conviction of the Holy Spirit with psychological feel good messages and **artificial atmospheres**, creating artificial environments
- Replacing true fellowship with a **rock concert**

What you need to understand is that all human approaches are impotent weapons, they are simply weapons of the flesh. You use those things to fight battles on the human level.

D. Carnal weapons are only effective on a **human level**.

These weapons are nothing more than ***GIMMICKS***.

- You use those things to **sell** soup and cars and suits and vacuum cleaners and houses.
- You use those things to convince people they ought to go to **college** or that they

- ought to go to a different career or a job different job.
- You use those things to sell your presidential candidate.
- You use these human techniques to **sell more product**.

But their all powerless! They're pea shooters. They are pop guns with a plastic ball on a string. You are not going to tear down the kingdom of darkness with these methods. You are not going to see souls in heaven because of these carnal weapons. They're little plastic nerf weapons with soft rubber darts that my children shoot at me.

- These weapons can fill a church! But they cannot save the souls of men and women.
- These weapons fill a church just like **entertainment** can fill a theatre and a **circus act** can fill an arena.

These weapons only *appear* to be effective. They gain only superficial, temporary victories.

Our mission is not to entertain or to grow our kingdom. Our mission is to bring people into the Kingdom of God through radical salvation – a radical transformation of their soul. Let me show you how we do that.

### III. The **Mission** of our warfare (vs. 5-6).

The enemy is formidable and gimmicks and slick advertising is not going to bring him down. So Paul says in **2 Corinthians 10:5-6** (ESV) — “5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, 6 being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”

A. What is a **fortress**?

#### **Ancient Cities Had Fortresses**

We need divinely powered weapons, because we are dealing with fortresses. To the mind of the New Testament reader, a fortress was a very powerful image. A fortified fortress in the ancient world was impregnable and was a place to which the inhabitants of the city could retreat when they were under attack.

Ancient cities would build a special fortress where the people could be preserved in times of attack or disaster. Many cities had the entire city walled and fortified with exterior and interior walls, great massive thick stone walls. These forts often had great towers from which people could scout and see oncoming enemy armies and from which they could fire whatever weaponry they had at their disposal.

B. The fortresses people hide in are fortresses of **lies** and **prideful arguments**.

#### **Fortress = Prison**

It is interesting that the word for fortresses can also mean prison. This is important because we need to understand what these fortresses are. What does Paul say he is attacking? He gives the answer in **verse 5**, “We destroy arguments and every lofty

opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ". What is an "argument"? We get the definition from Paul. The word "and" is KAI and it can mean "even". So he says, "We destroy arguments, *even* every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (vs. 5). Proud philosophies that exclude God from people's lives—that's what we are fighting against!

### **Not About Fighting Demons, But Demonic Reasoning**

Spiritual warfare is not about fighting demons. It's about confronting demonic doctrines and philosophies with the truth. The fortresses are the philosophies and the arguments and reasonings that people use to continue in their rebellion against God.

We are destroying arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. That defines what the fortresses are.

### **People hide in these Fortresses**

The word "arguments" means "means thoughts and ideas, opinions, reasonings, philosophies, theories, ideologies, or religions". These are the fortresses in which men hide.

Notice these fortresses *are not demons*. We have a lot of people who want to define spiritual warfare as chasing demons. We've got books about the unseen spiritual warfare by Frank Peretti and others. Listen, we ought not to be focused on demons, but on the lies that people hide behind. We are never instructed in the New Testament to call out demons or to have a spirit to spirit confrontation with them. We are called to assault the kingdom of darkness with the truth.

So very simply, we are to attack every concept, every opinion, every reason, every philosophy, every theory, every ideology, every thought that is against God!

C. Our divinely empowered weapon: the truth of the Word of God.

**Verse 4**, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

So if we are to attack error, then what is our divinely empowered weapon? It is the truth of the Word of God.

- James says, we are to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (**James 1:21**).
- Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:2–6 (ESV) — "ut we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"

has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The systems of thought in this world: naturalism and evolution, and false religions- even secularism and materialism. These are all opposed to Christ.

We are called in **verse 5**, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ”.

D. We are commanded to take “every thought **captive**” to Christ.

“The word “thought” refers more specifically to the mind as the intellectual center of our being. The idea is that Christ does not **simply help people to think holy thoughts**, but that “their mental structures, the plans and schemes, are taken over and transformed as they come to a new allegiance” (Carson).<sup>3</sup>

We are, as Paul says in Ephesians 4, to be “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph. 4:22). You are powerless to change or to change others without the Word of God!

- People want to blame their sin on the brain. They believe their sinful behavior is a result of a chemical imbalance.

**Application:** If you want to fight the spiritual war, learn the Scriptures. Learn how to deal with the error. Learn how to confront the error with the truth.

### **The Nuclear Bomb of Scripture**

It’s not just signing a doctrinal statement, it’s about reasoning the truth out of Scripture. People say, “Why do you always spend all the time in the Scripture?” Is there a better weapon? There is no better weapon. I suppose we could figure out some human weapons but why use a BB Gun when we can use the Nuclear Bomb of Scripture.

Error falls only before the truth. Rebellion ends when truth prevails. That is why we do what we do. We preach truth and proclaim the truth. ***Only the Word of God can smash the lies.***

**Romans 1:16** (ESV) — “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” It is the power of God. Gimmicks will not save souls. The Word of God will smash the fortresses of the lies. Let’s depend on the Word of God.

**Conclusion:** There are times when we see evil so blatant, so powerful that we shudder with fear and weep in despair. People in our culture are enslaved in their fortresses which are prisons, and will one day be their tomb. It’s not hard to spot the evil that lurks in the displays of sensual ads, and godless music, or in the ads that lure people to believe lies of materialism.

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians : Power in weakness*. Preaching the Word (184). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

The fortresses are lies which are taught through the media, in our schools, and re-enforced through music and advertising every where. The message is: You can be happy without God. Or, God wants you to be rich and happy.

Yesterday we were out spreading the Gospel door to door. It seemed each door we came to, people had the music or the TV turned up loud.

They were trying to drown out the truth of their conscience. They were trying to drown out the emptiness of the fortress of lies they are in.

Who will help them? Only the Word of God can transform them. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**). The Gospel is the power of God that can destroy their fortress!