

## Spiritual Battles

2Corinthians 10:1-6

The thought occurred to me the other day that there are a number of important invisible things that I don't pay very much attention to.

It is not too often that I think about the air I breathe, and yet every second of every day it is playing a vital role in my existence.

I don't consider the force of gravity on a daily basis, but everything in the universe operates according to its law.

Magnetism, ultraviolet light, sound, friction, and alike are all things that have an impact on us every day, but they are also things that rarely cross my mind.

Now if that can happen to us with things in the physical world, how much more likely is that to be the case in considering the spiritual realm?

I confess, I go through most days without giving a whole lot of consideration to the spiritual forces at work in the world.

Part of the influence of the culture in which we live is the idea that science can explain everything and the underlying assumption of that is that we only consider the physical world around us.

The Bible gives us a different picture of the world, it shows us that there is also a spiritual dimension to creation.

We know from examples like Balaam and his donkey or Elisha being surrounded by the Aramean army that angels are present in the world though normally invisible to the human eye.

Besides angels the Bible also tells us about demons parading as false gods, afflicting people in all kinds of ways, and deceiving people in whatever way they possibly can.

While we may never see any of these things taking place with our physical eyes, we do experience the effects of this behind the scenes battle in our everyday lives.

[Whether people like it or not and whether people know it or not we are all involved in a spiritual battle which involves forces beyond our normal perception. We are all involved in it and so the only question is which side are we on? If you are a Christian then you are at war with the devil and all that belong to him. The apostle Paul was very familiar with this reality and so it is not surprising that he addresses this issue in a few different places in the New Testament. Our text for this morning **2Corinthians 10:1-6** is an example of that. In this text he returns to dealing with some people who are opposed to his ministry in the church and shows us that there is more happening than simply a disagreement between people, he shows us that there

is a spiritual battle taking place. That same thing is true for us and the apostle has some valuable lessons for us in these verses about fighting spiritual battles. First he shows us that...]

**Point #1 – Spiritual battles require Christ like courage. (Verses 1-2)**

When we come up against those opposed to what is right and good we must patiently endure whatever is thrown at us by trusting in God.

Having sorted out what he wanted to with regards to the gift the church had promised for the poor in Jerusalem, the apostle Paul turns his attention here at the beginning of chapter ten to deal with the group of people trying to stir up trouble in the church and draw people away from the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we work our way through these verses we will see that Paul sees this as something more than a situation that needs to be worked out between people.

This is more than disagreements between people over earthly things, it is also a battle between unseen supernatural forces at work in the world.

As he prepares to fight this battle with his pen, he writes this in **verse 1**.

Paul has been to Corinth enough times and has written enough letters that people have gotten to know what he is like.

Some people, it would seem, are trying to make a big deal of the difference that seems to exist between how Paul is in person and how he sounds in his letters.

He even admits that himself here in the second part of the verse.

He says, “I am humble face to face and bold when away.”

It is easy to see how that could be used to create the appearance of a black mark on the reputation of the Apostle.

It could call into question his integrity. He is inconsistent in what he says and how he acts.

I’m sure we have all experienced that in our own lives.

It is amazing what people are willing to type behind the safety of a keyboard that they are unwilling to back up in person.

I think we can all agree that is a bad practice and so it is understandable that Paul would want to deal with that accusation.

He could have dealt with it by justifying the difference between his letters and his in person visits.

The most logical explanation that comes to my mind is that the situations that required a forceful response happened while he was away and not while he was present.

Instead of offering a defense on the particular situations he begins by showing the virtue of “meekness and gentleness”.

You see his opponents were likely misrepresenting his humility as weakness.

“He talks a good game” they were likely saying, “but when it comes down to it he is a paper tiger”.

Meekness and gentleness, however, does not equal weak and fearful.

Instead they are qualities of the character of Christ shining through in the life of Paul.

Jesus showed these character traits throughout His earthy ministry and they were most evident during His trial and execution.

Did He suffer insults, lies, and beatings because He was too afraid and weak to stop them?

No, He had the power to stop it, but He humbled Himself before God to the point of death so that death could be overcome for all those who believe to the glory of God forever.

In the same way Paul wants the church to understand that his humility and gentleness are not signs of weakness. (Verse 2)

He doesn’t want to have it out when he comes to the church, but he will if he has to.

Those in the church who think he is fearful or cowardly in person on account of his humility will find out that he is willing to stand toe to toe with them if necessary in order to fight for the truth of the gospel.

To do that well takes Christ like courage.

[There are so many pictures of Jesus’ gentleness and humility in the gospels. He invited the little children to come to Him, He looked with compassion on sick, He took the position of a slave to wash the feet of His disciples, and alike. At the same time, He starred down angry mobs, fashion a whip to drive money changers out of the temple, boldly confronted people in their hypocrisy, cast out demons, and faced off with the devil himself.]

Paul understands here that he needs that same kind of humble courage in the situation that he is dealing with.

The same thing is true for us.

When problems or conflicts arise in our lives as believers it is easy to fall off the road on either side.

It’s is easy to lose meekness, gentleness, and humility.

It’s possible to have all kinds of boldness and very little in the way of compassion.

On the other side it is easy to give into fear and be unwilling to deal with real issues of sin.

Neither of those mistakes is helpful when it comes to fighting spiritual battles.

[There is an unseen war that is raging all about us between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of darkness. To be able to stand on the right side of the battle for the right reasons is a gift from the Holy Spirit working in us to display the character and glory of Jesus in the church and in the world. Here is a second lesson about fighting spiritual battles...]

**Point #2 – Spiritual battles require spiritual weapons. (Verses 3-4)**

Physical strength and earthly wisdom are insufficient to free people from the prison of their rebellion against God and the power of the devil, only the power of almighty God can do that.

Paul's opponents were trying to make the case that he and his fellow co-workers were 'walking according to the flesh' it says at the end of verse 2.

When we see that word 'flesh' in the bible it can be used in at least two different ways.

It can refer to acting in a way that is separate from God.

This can include sinful desires like greed, immorality, idolatry, envy, unrighteous anger, gossip, and alike.

When we are being governed by our sinful desires we think and act only according to those earthly desires.

This kind of "walking according to the flesh" is based on human wisdom, desire, and resources.

That is the charge some are bringing against the apostle.

They are saying that he is acting according to his sinful nature using worldly wisdom and resources.

A second way the term 'flesh' is used in the bible is to refer to our physical bodies.

We have skin, bones, muscles, organs, etc.

We find both of those uses here. The charge is Paul and his co-workers are operating according to sinful/worldly means and this is how he responds in **verse 3**.

It is certainly true that the apostle and his co-workers have physical bodies.

They do live in the flesh and if church tradition is any reflection of reality then the apostle was not much to look at.

He was likely small in stature and not very attractive according to worldly standards.

We know from his testimony in chapters 11-12 of this very letter he was afflicted with significant physical weaknesses.

He gladly admits that he is only a man of flesh and blood, but he refuses to concede that his ministry is happening according to worldly means.

He likens his ministry to 'warfare' here.

This is no ordinary war. Human swords, shields, bows, and spears, cannot overthrow the enemy he has in his sights.

Neither can human intellect or strategy make the necessary difference.

He says they are NOT waging war according to those things... **Verse 4.**

The key to understanding this verse I believe lies in the word 'strongholds'.

A stronghold is a fortified building in a city to which people could flee to be protected in the event the city were under attack.

If that is the picture that is intended here that would mean that Paul is seeing himself and his fellow missionaries as being on the offensive in this war.

He is seeing the preaching of the gospel as attacking Satan's kingdom, his city, and no matter how hard the enemy tries to keep people under his power, His strongholds are destroyed and people are set free.

That can't happen according to human ability or wisdom that can only have according to 'divine power'.

[A few years ago when we took a team to Togo for a mission's trip one of the things that our team did was make some repairs on the backhoe at the hospital. I happened to come into the shop when Joel and a couple of Togolese men were trying to loosen rather substantial bolt. They ended up having to put a long piece of pipe on the wrench to get some more leverage and the two Togolese guys were hanging off the piece of pipe and finally the bolt loosened. One of the guys said, "You see, you just needed some African muscle."]

To accomplish any job requires the right tools and a sufficient amount of strength and power.

That is certainly true in the realm of spiritual warfare.

Going to war with Satan takes more than a good strategy and organizational skills.

The war being waged is about something far more significant than gathering a group of people together, building buildings, and creating a social club with emotional supports.

It is about people who are spiritually dead being raised to life, it is about people being held by the power of Satan being set free.

Only weapons of divine power can accomplish that.

In Ephesians six we are told what some of these weapons of 'divine power' are.

We are told there about the belt of truth, about feet being fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit being the Word of God.

We are told in Hebrews that the word of God is, "Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

[These are the things we need to fight spiritual battles. Our own wisdom and strength will surely fail so our only hope then is to look to the things through which God almighty exercises His power on behalf of His people. Believing that he is fighting with weapons of divine power leads Paul to an important conclusion about the battles he is fighting. That is the third lesson from our text this morning, that...]

**Point #3 – Spiritual warriors fight expecting victory. (Verses 5-6)**

Those that find themselves on the LORD's side can be confident that He will carry the day in the fight against darkness.

Listen to what is written here in verse 5.

Much like our own day there was no shortage of opinion and philosophy in the ancient city of Corinth.

Paul was no stranger to debate or to defending the gospel.

There were false teachers in abundance and the apostle found himself standing against them for the truth on a regular basis.

Considering all of that we might wonder if he would get discouraged from these spiritual battles.

How many times did people like his opponents at Corinth work their way into churches and stir up trouble and call into question his ministry and his apostleship?

Likely that happened more than a few times.

If we were to evaluate the situation based on worldly observations we might question who is going to win the battle.

Paul, though is putting his trust in God's power rather than his own.

He knows and believes that the LORD will overcome in the end so he is expecting to overcome everything and everyone that stands opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our memory verse for the month is Psalm 18:30 which says, “This God, His way is perfect, the word of the LORD proves true. He is a shield for all those to take refuge in Him.”

We can trust in the power of God, we can trust in the wisdom of God, and we can trust in the faithfulness of God.

That is because it will always prove true in the end.

That is what the apostle is likely driving at when he says that they, “take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Commentator Murray Harris argues that Paul is likely not thinking about every thought that runs through a person’s mind, although we certainly should strive to be obedient to Jesus in our thoughts, he is likely thinking about thoughts or ideas that give people reason to reject the gospel of Christ.

He is talking about overcoming, restraining, or making powerless those thoughts/ideas so that those belonging to the LORD will not be deceived by them any longer.

Paul expects that by knowing, believing, and trusting in God the gospel will be victorious in every spiritual battle.

He expects that to happen in the case of the Corinthian church (**Verse 6**).

He is expecting the truth to prevail in the church and the strong majority of the believers in Corinth to come down on the right side of this spiritual battle.

That is what he likely means here by their ‘obedience’ being ‘complete.’

When that happens it will open the door to “punish every disobedience”.

On the surface that may sound like any little mistake a person might make will bring down a punishment upon them.

If that were the case every church would be empty because we all stumble on a regular basis.

What he is talking about here are those people who cling to the arguments and opinions ‘raised against the knowledge of God.’

In other words these are the people who are distorting or twisting the gospel so that it is really no gospel at all.

Once the majority of the church has come to obey the truth then those that continue to cling to the darkness can come under the discipline of the church.

You see, he is expecting to win this spiritual battle because he is fighting on the right side of it using weapons of divine power.

[Some of you may remember back in 1992 when the Olympics allowed professional athletes into the games. The USA put together a basketball team that they called the 'Dream Team'. Among others the team had Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Karl Malone, Patrick Ewing, Charles Barkley, Scottie Pippen and of course, Michael Jordan. Because of all that talent they were expected to win and they did win because they were the best basketball players on the planet at the time.]

How much more confident should we be in the LORD and His ways?

It is true there are many philosophies and religions in the world and all of them, albeit to varying degrees are opposed to the truth that humanity is at odds with God and our only hope rests in God the Son Who took on true humanity to die in our place.

Not only did He die to rescue us, but He rose up from the grave to prove that He is the only One worth trusting because He is the only One Who can conquer all our enemies including death.

Because that is true. Because Jesus is alive and reigning in heaven you can be sure that every idea or philosophy or religion or power opposed to Christ will fall.

I confess that is a struggle for me at times.

At times it can seem as though the battle is going to be lost.

The great encouragement of this text is to place our confidence in the power of God rather than how things might appear at a particular time and place.

*It is good to be reminded this morning that there is a spiritual battle being waged in this world.*

If we stop and look around we can see the effects of spiritual warfare all around us.

A biblical worldview is being attacked from outside the church as well as from within.

Whether we like it or not if we name the name of Jesus then we are in that battle.

If we are going to be found faithful in that struggle then we are going to need Christ like courage.

To be meek and gentle and yet unwavering in the truth.

We are going to need to use spiritual weapons. Earthly things cannot conquer sin and death and hell.

Only the power of God can do those things.

And if by God's grace we are trusting in God's power then we can expect to win every spiritual battle that comes our way.

Praise the LORD, He never fails.



