

Battle for the Mind

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[0:00] All right. Made me feel like I was a school teacher, Mr. Kintzer. So my name is Jesse. Those of you who don't know me, it's, yeah, it was great actually meeting some of the new faces here today.

So glad you are with us. And it's always the delight to meet new people. And really our vibe and why we do that community moment is like we really see church as family. This isn't something you show up to on a Sunday. You go home and you just live separate lives. We love to get integrated in and do life together because that's what discipleship is. We do follow Jesus, but it isn't just me, myself, and God.

It's me and God and his people, his body working together and walking together. And we see that all throughout scripture. There's no other way, I don't think, to do Christianity.

And so I just am so thankful that some of you have decided to be with us for the first time. And so just, I would encourage you, stick around a little bit more, get to know us a little bit more.

[0:59] Hopefully you become family and you start to feel very connected in with us. So we are continuing in our series on 2 Corinthians. And we're into a new chapter.

And actually, it's a new section of 2 Corinthians. We've been through a lot. You know, there was a section where Paul's working through some stuff and it's a little bit awkward. He's addressing sin and some of the accusations against him as being powerless and weak.

And then we shifted into another part of him like saying like, hey, I remember that letter I sent and calling you to repent of sin and you guys did. And that was awesome. And that was amazing. And then he said, now let's talk about money.

And so the last two Sundays, it was on giving, which is, it's okay. That's a good thing. And then now he pivots and Paul is defending himself. That's what he's doing for the next few chapters.

And he's having to do that because his character is being under attack. And not just his character, his message and ministry as well. And when you follow Jesus long enough, you will realize that is going to happen.

[2:02] Despite your best efforts, you could be the nicest guy or gal in the world. And along the way, people are going to attack you for your beliefs. And so what we see is we see a help in this passage to bring two things together that seem incompatible.

On the one hand, people say things that aren't true and maybe about us, maybe just about the truth itself, about the gospel itself. And in those moments, we feel duty bound, right?

To set the record straight. And then on the other hand, the Bible tells us to be gentle and meek and not quarrelsome. And so we say, how do we confront others while at the same time being Christ-like, right?

How can you point out to someone that they are wrong while also being humble? It's not always an easy line to walk. So before we get into this chapter, here's some context.

So when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he had already visited Corinth twice. And his second visit, he calls his painful visit. We don't exactly know the specifics of that, but several things are likely true.

[3:12] First, he dealt with some people in the Corinthian church who were living in rebellion to Jesus. They were living in open sin unrepentantly. But it seems like the way he dealt with that at that time of his severe visit kind of proved ineffective.

And secondly, there seems to be a contrast between that visit and another difficult letter that we don't have available to us, but it's referred to, that he calls the severe letter.

Or they call the severe letter. And from that, from those two things, he got this reputation. Like the Corinthian church started to think like, man, Paul's all bark but no bite.

Like he's a good cop when he's present with us, but he's the bad cop when he's far away and writing us letters. And so people who were steering the Corinthian church away from the gospel were using that as an argument to win them over, to pull them away from Paul to themselves. They're saying, you know, like, look, why listen to Paul? He's a bully and he's not even a good bully. He's weak. And so with that, let's jump into chapter 10 of 2 Corinthians.

[4:19] It says this. 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.

He's being cheeky there. 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.

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.

Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.

[5:21] For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters.

For they say his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak. Ouch, man. And his speech of no account. Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.

This is God's word. So you feel Paul's emotions, right? It really comes through. You see, you have this sense that he is battling here. His ministry, his character are being picked apart by divisive actors in the Corinthian church.

And they are speaking about Paul to the church. They're not like, they're not coming to Paul and being like, hey, Paul, we just want to address some stuff with you. They are gossiping and they are slandering his name.

And their desire isn't for the sake of the Corinthian church. They don't have her best in mind. They aren't looking for unity. They aren't looking for restoration between Paul and the church.

[6:33] They aren't even caring about doctrinal faithfulness. They want to lead the church in a different direction. And that direction was not toward Jesus. And for Paul, that's what is worth fighting for.

And that's why he's so passionate. And we have to learn to fight the right way for the right thing. That's what we're seeing here. I mean, too often church people, let's own it, we get into fights over assets and aesthetics, right?

We do. It's the wrong battle. Too often we crusade for a ministry style or program we like with a passion. And so we just turn into a wrecking ball to get our way.

Wrong battle. Wrong way to fight. And that's just not fighting the right way for the right things. In our quarreling over those type of things and our passion over those type of things, what we end up doing is we end up biting and devouring one another, to use a phrase in another letter of Paul's.

And so what we end up doing, we end up looking like the animal kingdom. We end up like those alpha males in the herd and the packs that are fighting one another for dominance and domination. And church isn't supposed to be like that at all.

[7:46] It's not. It's not the mightiest and the meanest get to rule the roost. Biting and devouring one another is not acting like Jesus. He most commonly is referred to as the good shepherd.

May good shepherd, good shepherds don't have fangs and claws. And when we act that way, we are not following.

We're not sounding more like Jesus. Actually, we sound more like a wolf. In Acts 20, Paul warns the Ephesian elders in his final address to them, to watch out for fierce wolves that will come in to destroy the church.

Verse 30, it says, And from among your own selves, from among your own ranks, will arise men speaking twisted things. They're going to take the gospel, then they're going to use a little bit of the truth, and they're going to twist it to their own advantage, to manipulate you for their own benefit.

Why? To draw disciples away after them. Fierce wolves. In Paul's defense, he's not, he's going after, he sees there are fierce wolves in the Corinthian church, and that's why he's so passionate here.

[8:53] His defense of himself has a higher purpose. The church is in danger. And these bad actors are succeeding. And they are tearing apart Paul's reputation. And by extension, what they are doing is they are tearing into and tearing apart the church's faithfulness in the gospel, and their trust in it that he has proclaimed to them, and he has called them to believe.

And the result is the church is splintering, they're fracturing, there's infighting, there's ugliness, there's sin, there's bitterness, there's arrogance happening. And so to save this church, because Paul loves the church, he loves it more than himself.

Paul has to defend himself. And here, Paul gives us a master class on how to wage war God's way. And the first thing we learn is from verse 1 and 2. Let's look at it.

He says, I, Paul, he wants them to make no mistake who's talking to them. I, Paul, myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who I 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.

[10:11] And although this may seem contradictory, being gentle and bold are not mutually exclusive. Paul's critics are accusing him of being weak in person.

I mean, they say like, man, he just looks weak. I don't know what Paul looked like, but apparently it wasn't impressive. But man, he can act like a bully too. So in one setting, he's accused of being too nice.

And then in another, he's being accused of being too mean. He can't win. Now, let me say this. If Paul and if any of us live for the praise of people, man, that is going to destroy you.

People will always find something to pick out about you. And if you live for the praise of people, your hair is going to turn gray if you haven't pulled it out first. But Paul doesn't respond in their own terms.

Look at his opening line. He doesn't respond with vitriol. They're being ugly and mean. They're being impossible. What does he do? He entreats. He entreats. That is a very humble word.

[11:17] That is showing humility. It's like being on your knees, hands clasped, like begging and pleading for somebody to listen, right? And we don't like that.

We don't like to do that because that looks weak and it looks powerless. And we don't like to put ourselves in that position. But that's what's interesting. Paul does that. And he's okay to do that because he knows that's actually not the case.

He does have power and authority as an apostle. But he doesn't have to play that card. And if your only style of getting your way is being loud and aggressive and opposing and controlling, you aren't acting like Jesus.

And if you're a leader, you're not leading like Jesus. And Paul knows this, which is why he steps into you saying, I entreat you. By the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Meek does not mean weak. Okay? Okay? Meekness is power under control. Here's a good picture of this. Think of a horse, right?

[12:22] An unbroken stallion has all kinds of power. I mean, they are powerful, powerful animals. But it's a power that is dangerous. It's a power that is unpredictable.

And it's a power that is wild. You don't want to get in there and be around a wild stallion because you don't know if you're going to get kicked in the head or bit or what. Meekness is like a tamed horse with a bit and a bridle.

It still has all that same power potential. But it's controlled. It's safe. And it channels its power for good. And that's like the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Think about Christ. The full divine power and authority of God. But it's self-controlled. It's patient. It's kind.

It's loving. And it's strategic in its use. In Christ, we find meekness and power. In Christ, we find gentleness and boldness coexisting.

[13:23] Right? He wasn't going to prove his worth through big presentations of his power or owning his enemies. Right? And think about this.

When Satan tempted him, one of the things he said is he took him up to the top of the temple. Right? In Jerusalem. Which was the most populous place in Israel. And he said, throw yourself down and God will save you.

And really what he was implying is if you do this, all the people and all the important people, because that's where the seat of authority in Jerusalem was and the chief priests and the elders and the governing authorities, they'll see you do that and they will say, ah, this is the guy.

This is the Messiah. And again, the chief priest tempted him again on the cross to prove himself with this power by saying this. If you're really the Messiah, come down off the cross. You should be able to do that.

But in neither of those moments did Jesus give in. He exercised restraint. Right? And yet, that doesn't mean he wasn't bold at times.

[14 : 27] He didn't shrink back when the Pharisees challenged him in his teaching. He responded to them. He didn't run from demoniacs in fear. He didn't turn away crowds that were filled with the blind and the sick and the lame that were coming to him for healing.

He corrected and warned the Pharisees. He called them to repentance. He set the demoniacs free. He healed the crowds. You also see Jesus like, you see this boldness.

But you see this meekness with Jesus. He was willing to weep with Mary and weep over Jerusalem. And so he's doing all these amazing things. He's stepping into this boldness. He's doing it all without a fog machine in Instagram to bring him success.

And for Paul, that is the model to follow. To hold the line between humility and gentleness, strength and boldness. It's much easier to simply embrace one side of this.

But to get the best, you need both. You do. We need both. People who are never bold can tend to be weak in an ungodly way. Perhaps it's fear of confrontation, fear of being disliked, fear of being rejected, fear of failure.

[15 : 34] And they lack the courage to stand up and speak in difficult moments. But people who are never humble nor gentle, they can tend to be bold in an ungodly way.

Whether because of arrogance or pride or fear of looking weak, they can tend to be bullies. And they lack wisdom and discernment and discretion necessary to do confrontation well. And often they just end up making a mess of things.

Now it's easy to say that we need to hold those two things and deal with them well. It's a lot harder to live that way. I'll be honest. And it would be nice if we had something like a spiritual cookbook for every situation we encounter.

Where it says like, okay, let me turn to this. Oh, it says one cup of niceness and two cups of boldness. Boom, we're ready to go. I know what to do here. We just don't have one of those. The Bible doesn't work that way.

But that doesn't mean we're on our own to figure it out. It doesn't mean we should lose confidence that like for any situation we can encounter, we're just going to always get it wrong. Because we have the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth.

[16 : 36] Jesus promised us that. So this is what it means. Place your confidence in God, not in yourself. And for Paul, that's a settled reality of his life.

He knows the gospel really well. He's a spirit-filled, spirit-led man. When you read the book of Acts, when you read Paul's letters, the dude spends copious amounts of time praying, listening to God, and responding to the Holy Spirit.

You see he's a guy that is saturated in the Bible, in the Word of God. We see that. He's a truth-saturated, spirit-saturated God.

And you see it come out in his life. And that's where his confidence lies, not in himself. That's why he says in verse 3, for though we walk in the flesh, and he could say this with confidence. Though we walk in the flesh, like you accuse us of, we are not waging war according to the flesh, right? And he says that because he's responding. Paul's being accused by his critics. That is, ministry lacks any spiritual potency at all. In his earlier visits, it didn't produce results.

[17 : 45] When you look at his preaching, it's unimpressive. And when he shows up, he's a big disappointment, apparently, because he just looks weak. I don't know. But Paul's like, yeah, I'm going to own that.

I walk in the flesh. But I don't wage war according to the flesh. I wage war in a different way. I was in a church meeting once where there was a group of people from that church that they wanted to

have a meeting to address the lead pastor.

And they thought he was unfit for the job. And we're trying to figure out what was going on there. And when we asked why, the accusation brought against him were his preaching isn't good enough. And the attendance hadn't grown to their expectation in the past year.

And that's why. They didn't think he had the goods where it counted, which was keeping them from the results they wanted. They wanted to be a part of a church that was growing and vibrant and alive.

And they thought, hey, buddy, it's all on you, so you must be doing something wrong. And here's the thing. When we have certain measures of success, certain expectations in the church, certain things that we think of like, this is what I deserve to be a part of, and those expectations aren't met, we're going to go start looking around for who the problem might be.

[18:59] And what we're going to do is we're going to place our confidence in the wrong things. Those people that I was just talking about, they were placing their confidence in the wrong things. They were placing it in a man's performance.

It's really what it came down to. And Paul is being accused of not being spiritual because look at his ministry results. And he says, yeah, I do live in a body of flesh.

Meaning, I'm a weak vessel. I'm a jar of clay, cracked, broken in many ways. I'm a sinner. Paul was okay with saying that.

At one point, he calls himself the chief of sinners. He knows he needs grace, but he also says that's not where my confidence lies. I don't wage war according to the flesh.

My confidence is in the treasure that is inside of me, the Holy Spirit and the gospel of truth. That's where my confidence lies. And the gospel doesn't need to come with any other ornamentation.

[20:01] It doesn't. It doesn't need special lighting. It doesn't need skinny jeans. It doesn't need hyped up emotionalism. It doesn't even need the help of talented speakers. Paul is a prime example.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. That is it. That is it. It just needs to be proclaimed straightforwardly and simply. And when you send the gospel forward and the spirit comes with it, amazing things happen.

Amazing things happen. It's enough. And anytime we step away from putting our confidence in God and his power and his gospel, what we are doing is we are stepping into self-confidence and self-righteousness.

And that does damage to us and it does damage to the church. We start to step back and think, I'm building this thing. God needs me. And without me, it's going to be hopeless.

We can start thinking, I'm the one who's getting these results. Some of us in the room might be thinking back to situations in the church, previous experiences.

[21:07] That is exactly what happened and what it spiraled into. Now, it's easy to think that we are above that. It's easy to think like, yeah, I look back on this.

I see it. That's not me. But man, we're not above it. I'm not. You're not. Now, we have to watch out because when you drift into that mode, you forget how the war is won.

And it's not about church growth models or being more contemporary than everyone else. Verse 4 says, 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. Now, what Paul is saying here and what he has in mind is a Roman siege engine.

Let me explain. The Roman army, they were a conquering machine. I mean, they swept through the known world and conquered every bit of territory they put their feet on.

[22:10] And when they would come to a fortified city, which would be a city enclosed with walls that had ramparts at the top where you could have soldiers defending that they could fight from, the siege engine, the Roman siege engine would come and it would pound against a wall until it was breached.

It would break down those walls. And once a wall was breached, the soldiers could pour in, take the city captive, set up new rulership, and punish any who continued to rebel against them.

And Paul says, that's a great picture of spiritual warfare. But it's like the Roman siege engine, but it's not like the Roman siege engine.

Though gospel is a weapon, and it's a weapon of deconstruction. But not how you're thinking. Today it's really popular to deconstruct your faith, right? You see that all the time with people. They love to proclaim it on their social media accounts. It's become this, like, cool virtue to step into. It shows, like, this sense.

[23 : 12] They think they're being authentic. But that's not what Paul's advocating. Paul is saying, deconstruct, but deconstruct your doubts.

Deconstruct the philosophies and self-proclaimed truths that stand in opposition to the gospel. So when you hear something that sounds really cool and really good, and you compare it to the word of God, and those two things don't line up, you don't figure out, well, I wonder how the Bible's wrong, and this is right.

You say, okay, something's wrong with this if it's not lining up with this. Man, what we do is we lay siege to those things.

Not with picket signs and bullhorns, but with the gospel's truth. And we keep pounding against those strongholds with that truth and with prayer. And now I want to say this about strongholds, right?

We often think of strongholds of being out there in the world, and there definitely are. But they're in here as well. You and I have strongholds right in here, in our hearts and in our souls.

[24 : 18] And we need to reckon with that. And how about we start there first before we try to fix everybody else? How do we do that? When you and I take 30 or so minutes a day to open our Bible, and I mean really calm and surrender to it, invite God as you read that word to have it wash over you and say, Father, by your word, correct me, teach me, rebuke what needs rebuking, admonish, change, conform.

I'm going to lay my heart on the table for you to do what you need to do with it. What we're doing when we do that is relating the gospel and the spirit lay siege to our hearts.

And we need to do that regularly because there are a ton of little citadels of sin in there that the gospel is pounding against and needs to get at.

Strongholds that are holding us captive to lies and that have us wound up in darkness. And those things need to come down.

They do. And when we gather in community groups, like we've started, right? When we gather together and we confess sin and proclaim the gospel to each other and pray for one another, that's the spirit and the gospel laying siege.

[25 : 38] Warfare is happening. And being vulnerable and honest about your sin to others, that's one of the ways, helpful way, strongholds get brought down.

But it's important to remember that God isn't just in the tearing down business. Verse 8. For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.

And we have to be careful in that going after sin, that we don't overdo it, that may cause us to lose heart. Because God tears down, yes, he does, but it's to build something better.

God is in the building business. Now, the Puritans are good examples for us to follow. If you read some of the Puritans, man, they were pros at like recognizing sin, mining the depths of their sinful nature in their hearts and repenting of it.

But we can strangely swing into this like weird kind of form of self-righteousness where sin hunting is the only proof of maturity. Where it's just like, man, so-and-so, man, they're always like confessing their sin and calling out their sin and always hunting their sin.

[26 : 51] And they must be so righteous and good. Now, as good as the Puritans were at seeing their sin and pleading for God's mercy, they were terrible at pointing out God's grace at work in their lives.

So it was heavy on penitence and light on praise. And I'm not saying like going after sin is a bad thing, right? That's not what I'm getting at. But man, guys, we need to do that.

But we need to recognize the signs of God's grace in our lives too, the things that he is doing well, the renewal that we are seeing and noticing. And we need to give praise for those things and recognize those things and give thanks for them and seeing that he is at work.

Otherwise, if we don't do that, man, it's easy to fall into despair and despondency, thinking like, oh, I'm just never, ever going to be good. The Puritans were famous at being like, oh, I'm just a worm, you know?

Man, that's, we don't need to become spiritual Eeyores, right? We need to recognize our sin and we need to call it out and we need to confess it and repent of it.

[27 : 53] But man, we need to give praise for God's grace. As much as we want God to tear down our sinful strongholds, we have to make sure that we see how he's building you up, us up, new and better.

When's the last time you took inventory of your life? Just think, man, three, six, 12 months, looking back. Man, what has God done in your life? How have you seen him take you from this point to this point in holiness?

How has he seen you, how have you seen him change your heart? He can give thanks for that. Those are good things that you can see like, oh my goodness, God, you are at work. This is amazing. When's the last time you've done that?

And I think that would be fun homework for this week. Maybe that's what we talk about in community groups. And if you're not in one, maybe it's something you do around dinnertime conversation with friends or family. And that's why community is so important here because, you know what, you and I, we could be blind to see what God is building.

But my close friend, man, they may see it. And I may need them to tell me about it. And something happens in our hearts when we minister to one another that way.

[29 : 06] When we call out the grace of God over each other. It actually makes us better prepared to confess sin that wants to hide behind walls of shame. I want to say this.

There is a connection with confessing what God's building that leads to us being more able to confess what he is tearing down. When you are seeing God's grace and God's work in your life, it gives you some boldness to actually be more vulnerable and transparent.

To be more ready to recognize like, oh yeah, there's still some sin there, but you know what, I'm okay with that? Because look what God has already done. If he was able to do that with that stronghold, man, he is going to be able to do that with this stronghold.

And it's important to remember all of this is God's work over us. It's not our own. We don't get the credit. But he is tearing down disobedience, doubts and lies, and building back obedience and truth and trust in him.

And he never stops and never will because he is not satisfied being a king over a portion of our heart and our lives. He wants to be king over all of it.

[30 : 16] And that is how God is building his church, one heart at a time, conquering and rebuilding, tearing up bad foundations and building a new and better one.

Christ, the cornerstone, the gospel, the good and true and better foundation. But we have to accept this truth first. God has the authority to do that, and we have to come under that authority.

And let God do that. That's my encouragement to us today. Let God do that. Let his way at his pace. So here is what it requires of you and me. We have to recognize that and surrender.

That's it. Recognize that God is an authority. He has the power to destroy strongholds and surrender to him. As the band comes up and we respond, I want to say to any of us in the room that are not yet a Christian, thank you for coming and being with us today.

And I want to say this to you very plainly. You cannot save yourself. You cannot wage that kind of warfare that brings strongholds down in your life.

[31 : 24] And that could be something you see readily. It could be anger. It could be addiction. It could be a whole host of things. Your first step of surrender is confessing Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

It is confessing that you are a sinner and you need God's salvation. You need him to come and tear down those strongholds in your life and he will do that.

And the way that you respond, if you're saying, man, Jesse, that is me. What must I do? Man, all he says is to confess and believe that. And we're going to have a prayer up during our response in our time of examination that's coming up in a moment.

And that will be there for you to pray. And now I want to speak to those of us in the room who are already a Christian. I want to say, hey, what's your next step of surrender?

Where is the Holy Spirit? Where has he been hammering away at your heart? Man, listen to that. Recognize that. That is his grace.

[32 : 27] And he's doing that because he loves you. He's doing that because he knows that stronghold, that sin is going to destroy you. And it's going to tear you apart. And he doesn't want

that for you.

And he's saying, man, come and confess. Come and repent. Come and find my forgiveness and my grace and my love and my restoration and my renewal.

And you will find it with me. And then you will begin to see God's grace building you up. Maybe that's you today.

Or maybe all you need to do today is stop and say, man, God, I have seen where you have been working in my life. I have seen your grace at work.

And I just want to give you praise. That's a good response. That is a good response. And let's ask him, wherever you're at in that spectrum, to finish that work.

[33 : 23] We're going to take 60 seconds. Do business with God right now. We're going to do it all together. Silently close your eyes. Pray to him. Thank you. Amen.

Amen. Father, for my friends in the room, my brothers and sisters in Christ, for me, I pray what you have begun, you will bring to completion by your power, by your grace.

Thank you. Amen.