



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Corinthians 10: 1-6

Summer 2025

"Christian Warfare"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. We are in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, and we're going to look at verses 1 through 6. It's a new section of the book, and the hymn we just sang and the Scripture that Seth just read gives some indication of the direction that Paul is going now in 2 Corinthians. And so we read beginning in verse 1;

**10** Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! <sup>2</sup>I ask that when I am present I *need* not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. <sup>5</sup>*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, <sup>6</sup>and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

2 Corinthians 10: 1-6

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for the time we have together on this Sunday morning, this LORD's day. And O what a blessing it is to be with Your people, and what a blessing it is to sing hymns of praise to You and hymns that express our hope in this life, and to read the Scriptures and to consider this new division in the book, and the responsibilities that we have, and the greatness of them, and the greatness of the challenges that we face, which should remind us, and we'll be reminded of as we go through our text, of the importance of Your Word, and the importance of knowing it and studying it.

We are in a conflict—and it's every day...and we're not adequate for it. But You are, and You're with us, and Your Spirit is. And You've placed Him within us and Your Word is very effective, so we are well equipped.

But we need to act upon our responsibilities, and so LORD, we pray that You would implant within our hearts this morning, alert us as Paul is doing in this text, that we would be active in the spiritual warfare that we are in—aware of it and taking the proper precautions through the study of Your Word, and prayer and fellowship with the saints. So LORD, we pray You'd bless our time together spiritually.

And then what a privilege it is to pray for our daily needs, material as well as spiritual. You know all of our needs, Father, far better than we do. You know what's coming tomorrow; You know what's coming in the next seconds of life...and we don't. But we are in Your hands, and we are grateful for that, and pray that You would lead us, and that we would be responsive.

Bless our time now, Father, as we sing our next hymn. Use it to prepare our hearts for a time of study and to guide us in our thinking. Help us to understand the proper applications of the things Paul says. Equip us for the day and the week ahead.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) One of Alexander the Great's remarkable victories on his way to conquering India was taking the fortress on Sogdian Rock. It was thought to be impregnable, but Alexander was confident enough, and bold enough, to ask them to surrender.

The defenders of the stronghold mocked him. They said, "He would need warriors with wings to conquer it." But 300 Greeks, using tent pegs and ropes, scaled the face of the rock at night. In the morning, Alexander sent a herald to tell the defenders of fortress to, 'Look up at the cliffs behind them, and they would see his winged warriors.' They surrendered without a fight.

Now I don't know if Paul knew that story, but he used the same kind of daring language in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, to describe the Christians as soldiers well-armed for destroying fortresses.

Well, that's the subject of our passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verses 1 through 6...the subject that appears in the text suddenly, almost abruptly. If you've ever been outside when the weather changed when it was warm, but then you felt a cool breeze, the air turned cold, and a storm blew in, that's the sense we get when we turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. The atmosphere of the book clearly changes from warmth to coolness, from compliments to conflict. In fact, the change in tone is so significant that some scholars have argued that chapters 10 through 13 were originally not part of the book, that they were a separate letter added later. They're not. Chapter 10 begins a new section for a new problem.

False teachers who were trying to undermine Paul's authority and corrupt the faith of the Corinthians, are now addressed by the apostle. So there is a distinct change in the tone of these last chapters. Paul was like a mother, fighting for the safety of her children; he was, 'going to war' for them. But it's our war, too.

2000 years have passed. Paul is gone, the false teachers are gone, but the war they fought goes on—and we are in it. We're in it every day, and we're in a battle for the

truth of the Gospel. So the apostle's words are as relevant for us today as they were then. He tells us what we are to do: We are to be "destroying speculation", and we are to be, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (vs5). That is our subject this morning.

So, with chapter 10 we come to a new section of the book. The change in subject is clear and abrupt; it begins, "Now I, Paul, myself urge you..." And what he will urge them to do is, 'deal with the present problem of false teachers in their midst, or else he will have to deal with them when he comes again to Corinth.'

The false teachers questioned his authority, so he begins the verse in an emphatic way. "I, Paul, myself..." —which draws attention to him as the one who speaks, and the one who speaks with authority. There are three major subjects in the book of 2 Corinthians: *Christian ministry, Christian giving, and apostolic authority*. This statement begins Paul's defense of his *authority*. So he wrote to them in such a way that drew attention to himself as the one asserting authority—the authority of an apostle. But he didn't assert his authority with arrogance. He exhorts the Corinthians, he says, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." (vs1).

Christ was his standard. Christ was his 'Law'. He followed the Lord's example: Christ was *meek*. That's what Christ said of Himself. He used these words in Matthew chapter 11, verse 29, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek...", (or, "I am gentle"), "...and humble in heart." Meekness is not weakness...it is gentleness. It is loving compassion; it is selfless concern for the weak. That was Christ: "A bruised reed He will not break." (Isa 42:3).

That doesn't mean Christ could not be stern. In Matthew 21, He became angry. He took a scourge, (He took a whip, as it were), and drove the money changers out of the temple. He turned over their tables; and in Matthew 23, He pronounced a series of woes on the scribes and Pharisees. He faced them down with the truth, because they were corrupters of the truth and leading men and women to destruction.

Paul's meekness and gentleness didn't present sternness. Loving concern for God's children compelled him to speak firmly and harshly to the enemy. So the sternness of these last chapters is not inconsistent with a humble heart. There are occasions when a show of righteous anger is necessary. And in Paul's case, that might surprise some people because he was known as kind person, not the kind of person that is reflected here.

He was anything but 'a firebrand in an angry man'. In fact, he gives the description of himself in the next line; "...I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent." (vs1b). Now that was actually a statement given in sarcasm. He was repeating a slander of the false teachers... that's what they said about him. And there were probably some grounds for that statement on their part, because when he was with them in Corinth, he was humble, he was meek. He was a meek man—'a gentle' man. But after he left, you'll remember, he wrote a very harsh letter to them, correcting them.

But they had misread him, these false teachers, they were saying, 'Paul's a coward. When he leaves us and is a safe distance away, he gets bold and he writes harsh letters to you.' Philip Hughes in his commentary on 2 Corinthians characterized this slander as something like, "He's, (*Paul*), a craven dog that barks loudly at a safe distance." It was a way of fortifying their denial of his authority: 'Paul's a coward. Paul's meek when he's with you. When he's safely away, that's when he gets bold.'

Well, Paul was no coward—and you know that if you studied the Book of Acts; you see that all through it. He stood up against angry mobs. He made a defense of the faith before men of power; and he did so eloquently, under pressure. And when he came to Corinth, everyone in the church would soon learn how brave and bold he was if they did not clear up the problem that was there. That's the warning that he's giving here.

He wanted to avoid that. That was not typical of him, as I said. He was not a 'firebrand', he was a gentle person. And in verse 2 he returns to his request that they not force him to be severe; "I ask that when I am present I *need* not be bold with the

confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh." (Now that's the false teachers that he is referring to there.)

And this is another accusation they made against Paul; 'He was a coward!', and 'He walked according to the flesh.' That word, *flesh*, can mean 'the body'; it can speak of our 'physical nature'...but it's often used in Paul's writings of our 'sin nature', (our corrupt nature). And they were saying that Paul lived according to his corrupt nature—that he acted out of self-interest. He didn't live, 'a God centered life'.

His answer to that is given in verse 3 with a play on words; "For though we walk in the flesh...", (meaning, 'in the body that we have, with its physical limitations'), "...we do not war according to the flesh..."

Paul lived as everyone else did, with the infirmities of life, with the infirmities of the physical body, and subject to temptation. He was, (as he spoke earlier in the book), 'an earthen vessel.' (2Cor 4:7). But Paul didn't walk or, as he says, "war according to the flesh". In the Bible, 'life' is *a walk*. "Blessed is the man who does not walk according to the counsel of the wicked." (Psalm 1:1a). That's how it begins: 'Walk, live'. "Walk" implies progress. And in life, 'we progress along' and so it is described very often as 'a walk', an 'advance in time'.

But it's also a war. Paul knew that better than most from personal experience. So he frequently wrote about the spiritual conflict that we're in. We face it externally from the world and the devil; we experience it internally from the flesh. We continually have to contend with error and evil, with the powers of darkness which are both spiritual and material, demonic and human. And we have to master our thought life, because it is constantly being assaulted and invaded by the enticements of sin and bad ideas that come from the environment and the world around us—all of which try to overthrow the truth of God, contradict it, sow doubts within us about it. So, we are 'walking', we are 'progressing' in life toward a goal...our final destination.

But it's not a walk in the park. It's not a carefree walk. It is a walk across a battlefield with minefields in it. Paul understood that, but he didn't meet the spiritual enemy as ordinary men might. He didn't live by his wits. He didn't 'live by the flesh', as it were. He looked to the LORD. He was governed, he was ruled, he was guided by the Holy Spirit. He walked by the Spirit.

And this is not Paul's life only; this is the life of every child of God. We are "earthen vessels", as Paul eloquently explained back in chapter 4, verse 7, "earthen vessels" that are weak in and of themselves, and yet filled with God's "treasure", with His truth, with His Spirit...and we are to live by that. When we do, we live successfully.

That's what Paul wanted for the Corinthians, what he wants for us, for all of God's people. So in verse 4 he explains further, how we meet the enemy and carry on this spiritual warfare that we are engaged in; that we are engaged in at this very moment. And so he speaks of it and explains that we are in this spiritual conflict, we are engaged in it, and we have weapons at our disposal. Every soldier must have weapons in order to fight...and we have those weapons.

But our weapons are unusual; they are intangible. Paul said, "...for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." (vs4). Our weapons are not made of iron and steel, because our enemy is not made of flesh. We fight against *Satanic* forces. We fight against *spiritual* forces. We fight against *intangible* forces—so our weapons are according to that...our weapons are spiritual. And only those weapons will be effective. Any attempt to resist the enemy with any other weapon will meet with failure.

The Bible is filled with examples that illustrate that principle. You'll remember when David went out to meet Goliath in battle, Saul offered him his armor. It was splendid armor; it was the best in the camp of Israel. And on the face of it, that was a wise offer, because if you're going to go out and fight, especially if you're going to fight a

giant, you better have some armor on. And what better armor than the King's armor, than Saul's armor? So he dressed up David in his armor.

But it didn't fit. It was untested, and David couldn't use it. It would have been a cause of hindrance, not a help, had he done that. David needed something other than human weapons. He needed the protection of God, and a weapon that was divinely powerful; and he had that. He had that with his sling and a few rocks, and faith in the LORD.

The temptation we face in life is to go out in Saul's armor...which in our case is self-confidence; it's trust in our own abilities. And we may have many great abilities, some certainly more than others, but it may be charm, or human reason, a very skillful mind, a nimble mind with skillful arguments or eloquence. —It could be any number of things. There's nothing wrong, I should say, with a well-reasoned defense of the faith, an articulate, well-informed defense of the faith; because a well-informed argument to attacks on the Bible is very effective...and that's good.

There's no virtue in ignorance or a lazy mind. We should know the facts; the more the better. Facts are stubborn things, impossible to overcome. But it is not our skill or personal abilities that will make us triumph. It's not, 'the ways or means of the world' that give the church an advantage and lead to success in the spiritual war. Only the LORD does that. We must look to Him and use the weapons that He has given to us.

Paul lays them out in 'the Christian armor' described in Ephesians chapter 6: They are the weapons of truth, righteousness, faith, evangelism, the Word of God... weapons that the world would scoff at. But the powers of darkness fear them, because these are the effective means for, "the destruction of fortresses" (vs4)—spiritual fortresses. In verse 5, Paul tells us what these fortresses are. He speaks of, "destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God...". So these are 'fortresses of the mind and will'—intellectual strongholds.

The battle is between truth and error, between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. It has been that way from the beginning with Cain and Able into



the present. Wherever the Gospel has been presented, religion and philosophy have opposed it. Men, by nature, oppose the truth of God. Paul wrote that in Romans chapter 1, verse 18b; "...men...suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They know the truth innately...and they don't like it, and their response is to 'suppress it in unrighteousness'. They oppose it with their science and philosophy—and rest confidently in their own conclusions. These are their 'intellectual fortresses'.

Christian warfare is aimed at casting them down, while unbelievers' aim is at fortifying their mind against the truth that we hold...against the truth of human guilt, (they don't want to hear that), and the truth of divine grace. They reject all of that.

The lesson Paul is impressing on the Corinthians, (and us), is, 'We cannot do that in a worldly way. We cannot bring these fortresses down in our own strength, or in the flesh, or in any kind of skill like that. We cannot destroy spiritual fortresses by adopting the ways and weapons of the world.'

The City of Jericho wasn't conquered by conventional warfare. Israel's tactics seemed foolish; I think it must have seemed foolish to those people of Jericho after a few days of standing on the walls and watching them marching around. They must have gained some confidence as they looked at what was going on—but it was by marching around the city and shouting that the walls fell.

The Gospel is like that. It appears weak and foolish, but it brings down the walls and intellectual towers of men by *God's power* working through it, not man's abilities. He opens blind eyes. God's Word teaches that everywhere—nowhere more clearly, I think, than Zechariah chapter 4, verse 6 & 7, "...Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." (vs6). And he promised Zerubbabel that he would be able, 'to make great mountains into plains with shouts of Grace, grace to Him!' (vs7).

Well, that's the power of divine revelation over human reason. The Gospel, Paul said in Romans chapter 1, verse 16, "...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who

believes...". There is power, God's power, in the preaching of the Gospel...in the preaching of His Word. So we don't need to try to engage the unbeliever on his ground.

Paul never did; when he came to Greece and to Corinth, he told them in his first letter that he did not come as 'a philosopher'. He didn't come to the Greeks trying to be like a Greek, who highly valued eloquence and philosophy. In 1 Corinthians 2, verses 1 and 2, he didn't come to them, "...with superiority of speech or of wisdom..."; he "...determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

He preached the Gospel. Faith is not established in the unbeliever on the basis of argument and reason, (not that we don't have sound reasons for believing...we do, the soundest, the most logical), but it is established by God through the new birth, through regeneration. People are naturally disposed against the truth. (Romans chapter 1, verse 18). It's not an intellectual problem; it is a spiritual problem. All men know innately that there is a God...maybe I should say, 'All men know innately 'The God'!'

But they don't want to submit to Him, so they build 'fortresses', reasons and arguments against Him and His revelation. It's not something that can be argued away—it is a condition of the heart.

And when I say, 'the heart', I mean the *mind* and the *will* and the *emotions*. The heart, (literally speaking), is a pump; it's not where our intellect resides. But all through history, and over all kinds of cultures, men have seen the heart as 'the seat of the intellect'. When he says 'the heart', he means, *the mind and the will and the emotions*. So, before they can receive the revelation and respond to it, it must first be changed. There must be an alteration that takes place in order for them to accept and receive that proposition that we give in the Gospel about salvation through faith alone in the Savior.

But only God can make that change. And He speaks of that, (the LORD does), in passages like Jeremiah 31, verse 33, and Ezekiel 36, in verse 26, about 'the change' that He's going to bring about in the heart of men. He's speaking there of Israel and the change that's going to take place by His grace in the future.

But it's His work, not ours. He does that through us; He does that and makes this great change through the preaching of the Gospel...He's at work in that message. And when it is given, God causes the light of His truth to shine in dark hearts, wherever He wills to shine it, so that men understand. They're made to understand...and then they do respond.

Charles Hodge wrote, (referring to God's revelation), "It reveals the truth to the mind and conscience as self-evident, and therefore cannot be resisted." We come to 'see'...(not everyone; some maintain the fight to the end), but those that God has chosen and shed His grace upon, their minds are enlightened, and they respond. We don't need, in other words, to argue the obvious; they know the truth, (they're suppressing it). We give the truth, and God uses that.

And that's what we need to do. We need to present the truth, present it correctly, present it clearly, cogently, but ultimately the power is in the Word. It is in the Gospel, not in a presentation.

And that Word is *effective*. The author of Hebrews speaks of it in chapter 4, verse 12, 'It is alive and powerful.' And it is. This Word, right now that we're looking at, is alive and powerful...and it has its effect.

Abraham Kuyper believed that. He was a brilliant man, a great theologian, and an accomplished statesman. He was considered one of the most brilliant men of his age. He and B. B. Warfield had become close friends; but he was a man of all kinds of abilities.

In the early 20th Century he became Prime Minister of Holland. He established the Free University of Amsterdam. He started various publications; a daily newspaper, a journal, and so on. He was a brilliant man. He entered the ministry in his youth as an unbeliever, as a liberal, a man who was enamored of the latest ideas coming out of the liberal universities.

But it was conversations with a peasant woman in a small country church, where he first ministered, that led him to faith. She didn't have his education—she didn't have his mind, but she had God's Word. She had God's mind, and she knew it well. She knew

it better than Kuyper, and he would go visit her, and go visit her regularly, and they would have discussions, and they would have arguments, and he couldn't overcome her answers...and that changed his life.

The world rests confidently in the intellectual towers and fortresses that it constructs. Its great men are like the ancient Jebusites who taunted David from their high walls. They shouted that he could not come up there, that, 'The blind and the lame would turn him away!' (2Sa 5:6). Nevertheless, he captured the stronghold of Zion and he made that his capitol, Jerusalem, the City of David. And so it is with us, with the church in the spiritual war.

Grace prevails. God prevails through His Word. It knocks down great towers and takes prisoners. Paul said it not only 'destroyed speculations', but also is, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (vs5b). Now that's what we're to be doing: 'Knocking down fortresses as we preach the Gospel and deal with the unbeliever, and also be taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.'

When the LORD saves us, He captures our minds and aligns them with His revelation. And that 'capture' is really, *liberation*; by capturing us He frees us to think truth, to think God's thoughts—to think correctly. He liberates us from error, enslaving error.

But still, though we are free and we are new creatures at the moment of regeneration and faith, (all due to God's grace and power), nevertheless ,we are still influenced daily by the world around us—by its philosophies and by all kinds of things that we see and hear...and just within our own self, the sin that's within our members is constantly waging war with us. So we continually need to guard against that and be, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (vs5b).

That is a big challenge. The enemy and the influences we face are not always clear to us. They're subtle, and they're constantly at work. So, as I say, it's a big challenge

that we face—and for us, that is much of the spiritual warfare. It happens in our ‘hearts’. The mind is the battlefield of the Christian life. That's Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23, that gives the counsel, "Watch over your heart...", (your mind, your will, your emotions),

"Watch over your heart with all diligence,  
For from it *flow* the springs of life." (ibid.)

Well, how do we do that? First I would say, ‘In an act of faith, an act of basic faith.’ And what I mean by that is we recognize by faith that the Bible is the Word of God. That's what it claims to be...that's what it declares itself to be. It is our authority and we are to submit to it. And when we come to faith in Christ in the Gospel, we are coming to faith in God's Word, and all the Word of God—and it is our authority. And I would say, the more we read it and the more time we spend in it, we are convinced of that. It proves itself to be what it claims to be.

The Word of God, the Bible, is self-authenticating. But that's where we begin. We renounce dependence on our own understanding and submit ourselves as obedient people to the teaching of Christ, as ‘sheep to our Shepherd’. He has spoken to us in His Word. And it is through God's Word, through the regular study of Scripture, that we are ‘renewed and our thinking is transformed’. Paul makes that very clear in Romans 12, verses 1 and 2.

Then we do this by routinely spending time in prayer...that, as well, is what we need to do. Study the Word of God, and be men and women of prayer, giving the Triune God praise and thanksgiving, and asking Him for wisdom, asking Him for power, asking Him for all of that which we need in order that we live faithfully to Him; because our faithfulness is always being challenged.

We do it by routinely spending time with God's people, knowing them, getting involved with them, encouraging them, and being encouraged by them. We need Christian fellowship.

We do it by observing the ordinances, observing the Lord's Supper, and remembering Him through the elements. He's asked us to do that, routinely.

None of these recommendations are mere recommendations...they are not options, this is what we need. It is so important that daily we be "... taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." That's the routine of our lives...it involves personal discipline and self-denial.

The Christian life is all of grace. But if grace is received, we become a new creation, new creatures; and we have new energy and new ability and new interests...and we are a people that are very active in doing the very things that Paul is describing here. Paul wrote, in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, of all of this in a different way. He likened himself to an athlete, preparing for the games, a runner and a boxer that disciplines his body. Paul disciplines himself spiritually; but he uses those images to bring out the importance and the diligence that spiritual discipline requires. We need that.

Every good army must have discipline—and where it is lacking, there is disorder. Measures must be taken to correct it. And oftentimes it happens with God's people. And so measures must be taken. And that's what Paul threatened in verse 6; "...and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your disobedience is complete."

Now that last statement was an expression of confidence in the Corinthians...that, 'they would correct things'. These false teachers had caused havoc with the congregation. It needed to be dealt with, and he was confident that they would do that, they would 'correct things'—that they would cast off error and they would dedicate themselves to obeying Christ.

But it was also a promise—that he would deal with any who were unresponsive to their correction. He would not be timid; he would be bold, especially with those false teachers that had come in among them. Oftentimes that is necessary.

The Christian life is serious business. We are soldiers in a great war, a continual conflict. We need to be correct: Right in our thinking, right in our activity. Paul's purpose in all of this is to reassure the Corinthians that they, and the whole church, can triumph.

They are adequately equipped with the Holy Spirit, and with the Word of God to engage in warfare. There is no spiritual fortress, no matter how strongly fortified it may be, that God cannot overthrow. So we should be confident with the weapons that He has given us...and we should be bold.

No one was braver and bolder than the Scottish reformer, John Knox, who lived by the motto, "With God, man is always in the majority." That's true. And God is always with us.

The preacher of Ecclesiastes said, "There is a time for war." (Ecc 3:8b). And to that Paul would add, 'And that time is now!' We are Christian soldiers; we need to be ready, we need to be active.

If you've not believed in Jesus Christ, we invite you to trust in Him. You are living in a stronghold raised up against God's truth. If you stay there, your tower will become your tomb. Come out; surrender to Christ and receive forgiveness and everlasting life. The moment you do, you enter Christ who is a true fortress, a mighty fortress—and He can never fail.

May God help you to do that, and help all of us to heed the words of Paul, to live an earnest Christian life, studying the Word, being in prayer, encouraging one another in the fight that we are all in. May God help us to do that.

*(Closing prayer)* Father, we do confess our sins, they are many...even as Your children, Your people, who've been brought to saving knowledge of the Son, who have been washed in His blood. Nevertheless, we know, while we are justified and righteous before You, there is still sin within us and we stumble every day. But "Your mercy is more", and we give you praise and thanks for that.

Thank You for the salvation we have in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we live a life that brings honor to Him and glory to You.

Now,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His countenance on you,

And give you shalom. Peace.

In Christ's name. Amen.

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