

## **“THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND”** **(2 Corinthians 10:1-6)**

One of the realities of owning a computer is dealing with viruses and malware that try to invade your computer. Someone, somewhere in the world sits behind a computer in a basement trying to deceive you into clicking on a link or attachment that looks harmless, but when you click on it, it opens the door for hackers to enter your computer and steal your data. Anybody ever fallen prey to one of these?

Early computer gurus referred to these viruses as “trojan horses,” taken after the famous story of the Greek army who tried for years to overtake the city of Troy, but couldn’t find a way to breach it’s walls. They finally came up with the idea of building a big wooden horse to give to the Trojans as a peace offering. They left the horse outside the wall and pretended to sail away while the Trojans pulled the horse into their city as a victory trophy. That night while the Trojans celebrated with a drunken party, 30 Greek soldiers crept out of the horse’s hollow belly and opened the gates for the rest of the Greek army which had sailed back under the cover of night. Once inside the city gates they easily captured the city and burned the city of Troy to the ground.

As we continue our study of the book of 2 Corinthians, today in chapter 10 we see the Apostle Paul very concerned about a trojan horse – in the form of false teachers – that had infiltrated the church at Corinth after Paul left and threatened to destroy the good work of the gospel that began five years earlier when Paul and his missionary team planted a church in the city.

What makes this passage so relevant to our times is that we are daily bombarded with information unlike any time in history – with all kinds of thoughts and ideas and philosophies that seek to capture our minds. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Mathew 7:15). Jesus’ warning proved true in the church at Corinth, and in chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians Paul referred to these deceivers as servants of Satan masquerading as apostles of Christ – they look and sound harmless, but they are used by Satan to plant false teaching into people’s minds. The church has always dealt with false teaching, but it seems to be ramping up in the last days as we approach the Second Coming of Christ. We hear things like...

- “The Bible is a fine book, but it was written thousands of years ago and is outdated for the world we live in today.”
- “The things Jesus says about love and peace and justice are good, but what the Bible says about sexuality is oppressive and not realistic for the culture we live in.”
- “Jesus,” they say, “Was a great teacher and remarkable person we can pattern our lives after, but it’s arrogant to say that He is the only way to God – He is one way, but not the only way.” • “A loving God would not condemn those He created to an eternal hell – somehow, someday everyone will go to heaven because God is loving.”

All of these ideas are not only found in the world, but have even made their way into the church, and if the enemy can get you to think differently about the Bible, about morality, about who Jesus is, and about the way of salvation – the good news of the gospel becomes meaningless. One of the main responsibilities of church leaders and shepherds is to protect the sheep from wolves and harmful teachings, and in our passage today Paul is going to describe how we as a church and as individual

believers can counteract the trojan horses of deception and take captive the thoughts that war against us. In verses 1-6 Paul writes... “By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ toward you when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.”

Paul was making plans to visit the church in Corinth in the near future, and at the top of his agenda was confronting the false teachers who were teaching a different gospel from what he taught. Many of these teachers, we find out in 2 Corinthians, were Jews – referred to as Judaizers – who taught that along with trusting Christ for salvation you needed to maintain Jewish rules and customs – such as being circumcised and eating kosher food and keeping the Sabbath. This kind of teaching sounded good and reasonable, but it posed a dangerous threat to the gospel Paul preached – that salvation is not something earned through works, but is a free gift of God’s grace received through faith.

In order to convince people they were right, these false teachers needed show that Paul was wrong. Paul had led the Corinthians to Christ – he was their spiritual father – and in order to separate the Corinthians from Paul’s message, the false teachers had to separate them from the messenger. So they engaged in a smear campaign against Paul... “He’s not a real apostle,” they said, “He doesn’t have any credentials – He lives like a vagabond – He’s kicked out of one city after another – and he’s not trustworthy.” In verse 2 they imply that he’s not spiritual, but lives by the standards of the world.

Throughout chapters 10-13 Paul is going to defend himself against the attacks of his enemies – not because he’s personally offended and wants revenge, but because the gospel message was at stake. The Corinthians heard and accepted the gospel through Paul, and if his opponents could succeed in tearing him down, the gospel he preached would be doubted and discarded.

Paul begins chapter 10 by saying... “By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ toward you when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world” (1-2).

One of the ways Paul’s enemies tried to smear him was to say that he’s very bold in his letters, but in person he he’s timid and weak – kind of like people who say very bold things online, but aren’t so bold when they’re not sitting behind a keyboard. There was a grain of truth in this accusation – when Paul came to Corinth, he wanted his visit to be light-hearted and joyful – he didn’t want to come and find these intruders still there stirring up trouble – if so, he would be forced to be confrontational. He purposefully decided to address the hard, difficult things in his letters so that the problem could be cleared up by the time he came.

This is what he means in verse 6 when he says, “We will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.” In other words, Paul says, “When I get there, I will clean house, but I

would rather have all of you on my side so that the only ones have to confront are the false teachers. So I'm giving you time to get your house in order."

In verse one Paul says, "I appeal to you by the humility and gentleness of Christ." When it came to defending the gospel, he didn't have a problem getting in someone's face – but he preferred to use a humble, gentle approach like Jesus did. Jesus lived very humbly – He was slow to take offense – He didn't retaliate when treated unjustly – and He lived self-sacrificially. At the same time He was not afraid to speak frankly and forcefully, especially to the hypocritical Pharisees, or confront evil when he drove the money-changers out of the temple. Likewise Paul says, "I'll do whatever it takes to defend the gospel, but I prefer that you deal with these false teachers before I come so that I don't have to come and lay down the law."

In verses 3-6 Paul pictures the fight for the gospel taking place in the Corinthian church as spiritual warfare. He alluded to this earlier in 4:4 where he said, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This reminds us that there's a cosmic spiritual battle taking place behind the scenes in which Satan is doing whatever he can to keep unbelievers from believing in Christ for salvation. He wants to keep lost people trapped in the darkness of sin so that they will not see who Jesus truly is and what He came to do, and come into the kingdom of light.

In verses 3-4a Paul says that spiritual battles are fought differently than earthly, physical battles... "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world." As Christians we live in a fallen world that is not our home, but is controlled and dominated by Satan – it's his turf. When we dare to proclaim the truth – to shine the light into the darkness – we're immediately denounced as narrow-minded, simple-minded, backwards, unenlightened, and bigoted – and those are the nice things they say about us.

The temptation is to do what Peter did when the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus. He pulled out his sword and started swinging. I understand Peter. When I see Jesus being attacked, the Godly values of the Bible being attacked, when wrong is called right and right is called wrong – it makes me want to start swinging against the forces of evil and restore order.

But over and over in the Bible we learn that God wants us to fight our battles not with human power and zeal and ingenuity, but with His supernatural power. Zechariah 4:6 says, "'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.'" says the Lord God Almighty." Spiritual warfare requires supernatural power.

This is why many of the battles in the Old Testament were fought unconventionally. The walls of Jericho came down not by battering rams and sledge hammers, but by the Children of Israel marching around the wall seven times and blowing a trumpet. Gideon defeated a superior Midianite army of 135,000 with just 300 men by smashing jars on the ground and blowing trumpets. David defeated Goliath with a small, smooth stone. The common denominator in each of these battles is that God's people needed to trust in God's power in order to prevail – God stripped them of their human strength and empowered them with His strength.

Paul says, "This is where I and my opponents differ. They use worldly weapons like force and intimidation and coercion – but these weapons are like nerf guns – they're ineffective for fighting

spiritual battles – they can't change hearts and minds.” Paul says, “I fight spiritual battles with spiritual weapons.” He doesn't say what those weapons are, but they are spiritual in nature, and three such weapons come to mind.

The first is the **Spirit-inspired Word of God**. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. 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.” The Word of God is alive and dynamic – it penetrates to the core of who we are and exposes our deepest thoughts and motives. The Word of God reveals the truth of sinful condition and how we can be saved through faith in Christ. When God's Word falls on receptive, repentant hearts, it has the power to transform hearts and change lives.

The second weapon we use is **Spirit-empowered prayer**. There's a great story in the gospels about a father who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples, but they couldn't cast the demon out. So the father brought his son to Jesus and Jesus healed him. The disciples asked Jesus, “Why couldn't we drive it out?” And Jesus said, “This kind can only come out through prayer.” The disciples had the power of heaven available to them, but they forgot to pray, and using their own power they failed. God's Word and prayer provides a one-two spiritual punch that changes receptive hearts.

The third weapon is a **Spirit-filled life**. In chapter 2 Paul said that believers spread the aroma of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. When people see the power of God working in our lives, and the way we treat people, and the way we respond to afflictions, God uses our lives to influence unbelievers and gives us an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

The weapons of the Word, prayer, and a righteous life are powerful because they spiritual – they are supernatural – and Paul goes on in verses 4b-5a to describe our spiritual weapons do... “On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

In ancient times many cities would build a wall around their city for protection, and within the wall they built a stronghold or tower. If the walls were breeched by the enemy, the citizens of the city could flee to the stronghold to make their final defense. The stronghold was the hardest part of the city to overtake, but if it could be captured, the battle was won.

In verse 5 Paul identifies spiritual strongholds as “arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” The picture here is of a person in rebellion against God who refuses to surrender their life to Him – and the stronghold of their resistance is their mind where they have constructed ideas and arguments and philosophies and excuses to reject God. Once these ideas take hold of the mind, the mind becomes more and more hardened and darkened to the things of God.

Romans 1 describes the downward spiral of rebellion, beginning with denying or ignoring the existence of God. Every person can clearly see evidence of a creator, but many suppress the knowledge of God because they want to live independently from God. Instead of thanking God and worshipping Him as their creator, they begin to worship fleeting things like money, fame, and power. Then, Romans 1 says, they give themselves over to their sexual desires, and men abandon natural relations with women to commit shameful acts with other men.

Once they give themselves up to the lusts of the flesh, their minds become more and more depraved, filled with every kind of wickedness and evil and begin to justify any kind of behavior. Romans 1 ends by saying that they not only indulge in these things, but they approve of those who practice them. Pretty soon evil begins to be called good, and good is called evil.

Paul might as well have been describing America in 2024, where those who oppose God and His ways are like evangelists, doing everything possible to spread their worldview in schools, in media, in commercials, in movies, in songs, in sports, and even in churches. The reality is that the people who most shape our culture's thinking and philosophy are people who do not have a God-centered worldview – celebrities, university professors, media pundits, advertisers, and politicians control and dominate how culture thinks – and they persuasively and successfully get many to conform to their godless, worldly way of thinking.

Many Christians wonder, “What can we do?” One way is to wage war like the world does and use power and intimidation and pressure – to fight fire with fire – but against an enemy as powerful as Satan this is like shooting nerf darts from a nerf gun – only the gospel and the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit can change hearts and remove spiritual blindness. “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world,” 1 John 4:4 says. It is the gospel that tears down and demolishes strongholds.

On a personal level, this means that we always look for opportunities to speak the truth in love – to share the good news of the gospel any chance we get. As Ephesians 6 says, we gird ourselves with the belt of truth. Jesus said, “The truth will set you free,” and the truth of the gospel has the power to demolish strongholds and set people free.

And we pray, pray, pray – we employ the spiritual weapon of prayer knowing that only God can change hearts and minds – and prayer drives us to depend on God for spiritual breakthroughs. And we live out the truth of God in our daily lives, spreading the aroma of the knowledge of Christ everywhere.

This is how we fight the battle and how strongholds are demolished. Not everyone will change their mind, repent, and trust Christ – but some will. God does the saving, we are just His messengers spreading the good news of Christ, praying for lost souls, and living a life of integrity before a watching world.

Not only do spiritual weapons have the power to demolish strongholds, but verse 5 says they have the power to “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” Once we're saved, God wants to change the way we think. Romans 12:2a says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind.” Our minds need to be renewed because they have been programmed to think like the world, and our way of thinking doesn't automatically disappear. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

We change the way we think by daily reading and meditating on God's Word, by coming to church and Bible studies to learn more about the Bible together, and by listening to good Christian podcasts and sermons online.

As we feed on God's Word the Holy Spirit works to transform the evil impact sin has left on mind. I

remember a camp speaker once took a glass of dirty water and poured a pitcher of fresh water into the glass. As the fresh water continued flowing into the glass, the dirty water poured over the sides of the glass until it eventually disappeared. As we saturate our minds with God's Word, we renew our minds and we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ.

As we come to the Lord's Supper this morning, we remember the victory Jesus won for us on the cross. When Jesus died, Satan thought he had triumphed over Jesus, but by shedding His blood for our sins, Jesus made it possible for captives to sin to be delivered from the kingdom of darkness and be transferred to the kingdom of light. By taking of the cup and bread we remember that apart from Jesus' death on our behalf, we would still be enslaved to sin and death – but now we are set free from Satan's stronghold and belong to Christ.