

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“Hear then His voice today. Perhaps you are made aware of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order that you might die safely. Such a change is equally necessary if you wish to live comfortably now. As long as you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It is an easy thing to prove that procrastination is highly dangerous. Do you consider how many uncertainties you must presume upon? Are you sure that you will not be suddenly cut off by an unexpected stroke, or visited with fever? Tremble lest such be your end, if you are trifling with God, who is now calling you by His Gospel to seek Him today.” [John Newton]

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Waging War Against Strongholds

March 2nd, 2025

**Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians
10:1-6**

**Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians
10**

The church at Corinth had, among its membership, enemies of Christ. This statement makes the Apostle Paul’s words here very obviously quite relevant to our day, and really to every age in church history. Creeps creep in among the flock to deceive and destroy. Wolves in wool. And so it was at Corinth:

- Some denied the resurrection

- Others exalted human wisdom and philosophy over the gospel
- Still others boasted about how “tolerant” they were in permitting an incestuous man to remain in the church
- There was an evil teaching that claimed anything was permissible for one’s body – sexual immorality made no difference
- There was arrogant division into factions
- And there were those who did all they could to turn the church against the Apostle Paul and the gospel he preached.

We see this opposition to Paul referred to by him here in this 10th chapter:

“ who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!”

“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account.’”

Every true minister of the gospel will meet just these kinds of enemies among the flock sooner or later. Listen as I read again these first 6 verses:

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— (2) 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. (3) For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Let me recommend this means of self-examination , a way of testing oneself to see if you have really been born again:

How do you respond most typically to the faithful, biblical preaching and teaching of God's Word? If anyone responds as these counterfeits at Corinth were responding to Paul and the Word he preached, being critical of the messenger but not being able to refute the message preached, then this is the mark of an unsaved mind and heart.

Let me give you an illustration from issues in the news today. We all know that the federal agencies are under scrutiny and audit by DOGE. Massive fraud is being discovered and revealed for all to see. The auditors are showing the receipts line item by line item, evidence that cannot be refuted. Their message is *truth*. So what are the enemies of truth doing? They are attacking the messengers viciously, and this is the very thing that Paul was experiencing at Corinth and it is the very thing that typically happens in the churches

in our day wherever God's Word is faithfully preached. Challenge these enemies to demonstrate from Scripture where we are wrong in our preaching – and they won't. We have learned this over these many years here. Not a single one of these enemies has ever come, opened up their Bible, and demonstrated that the message preached is false.

So this was what was going on in Corinth and here we see Paul dealing with these fraudsters. Let's consider some of the things he said to that church.

I. Meekness and Gentleness are not Weakness

We saw this very accusation back in the early chapters of First Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3)

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Apply this principle to our own day. Consider for instance what takes place when a local church is searching for a new pastor. What kind of a man do many if not most of the congregation want, unless a church is fortunate enough to have had a good, solid, biblical foundation laid by the previous pastor?

- A nice guy
- A “dynamic” speaker
- A proven organizational leader
- A man who can attract many new people
- Rarely will the candidate be asked about his doctrine

Paul would have flunked each of these areas in the eyes of these

critics at Corinth. They regarded meekness and gentleness, Godly fear, as failings and faults. They rejected Paul and in so doing rejected the Word of God.

II. Ignorance of Christ’s True Weapons and the Nature of our Warfare

Let’s think carefully now about these phrases Paul uses here:

- Walking according to the flesh
- Waging war according to the flesh
- Weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh
- Weapons of our warfare are divinely powerful
- Strongholds

These Corinthians opponents had it all wrong and they were leading the members of the church into serious error as well.

If we do not understand who the enemy is and what his tactics are, we will fail to defeat him. Our

weaponry and tactics will be entirely powerless against him.

And these are the very facts that the Corinthians had all wrong. They believed, as do so many professing Christians and pastors today, that the way “to do the ministry” is by utilizing the methods and ideas that the world uses. Thus, local churches become nothing more than corporations and the pastor simply another CEO. Success is measured in terms of money and numbers and popularity with the world.

The Corinthians critics (see verse 2) “suspected Paul of walking according to the flesh.” What does that mean? Simply that they considered Paul as a mere man and as a result *they were evaluating him as a mere man*. In fleshly, human terms in other words, he was regarded as a failure. He was meek and humble and those qualities are not regarded as traits of a successful leader.

1 Corinthians 2:14-15 The natural person does not accept the things of

the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (15) The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

“He himself is judged by no one.” In other words, fleshly, unregenerate people are not capable of accurately evaluating greatness and power in God’s kingdom. They don’t “get it” because these truths are only understood as they are revealed to us by the Spirit of God.

A true servant of God like Paul (or like Christ Himself!) will be regarded as weak, as a fool, by the person who is devoid of the Holy Spirit. And a true church of genuine Christians will be regarded in the same way.

III. The Weapons of our Warfare

As we read what Paul says here in these first 6 verses, we cannot help

but think of his words to the church at Ephesus:

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

These Corinthian counterfeits were, in other words, evaluating Paul and his message *according to the flesh*. Which simply means, *according to the world's measure of success and greatness and truth*.

If the membership of a local church is unregenerate or ignorant of God's Word, that church will evaluate what their church does and the methods their leaders use, according to the world's measure of success.

Now, *the weapons used against an enemy are determined by the nature of that enemy*. If the enemy, for instance, is hold up in a deep, reinforced, concrete bunker then you aren't going up against it with a rifle. You need a "bunker buster" bomb. Likewise, if our enemy is not flesh and blood, then flesh and blood methods are not going to be effective. This is why Paul said:

"...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."

If you are not born again, then you simply are not going to "get" this. The unregenerate mindset is earthly, worldly, fleshly, tangible. The things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to such a person.

Let's think now about the nature of the enemy we face. Paul says that the weapons Satan uses are strongholds. Think carefully about this. What is a stronghold? The NASB translates the word as "fortress." It is "a strong, military installation." A fort.

Now, do not miss this point – *if you are an unregenerate person, not born again, then Satan holds you captive in an impenetrable fort defended by hordes of his demon soldiers. You are, in other words, a captive, a prisoner. And the fort is STRONGLY held and defended.*

In other words, YOUR MIND is what is captive in that satanic fort. This is your condition:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

And –

1 Corinthians 12:2-3 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols,

however you were led. (3) Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

But when Christ came-

Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

Ephesians 4:8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

This is the condition in which EVERY person outside of Christ is in. An impregnable stronghold from which there is no human means of escape. If you have read the novel or seen the movie version of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, think of his imprisonment there – and yet he was able to escape. Or think of the Hamas captives in the

tunnels under Gaza – yet even from there some are set free by man’s negotiations.

But THIS prison, THIS fortress is absolutely secure. No one has EVER escaped from it by human means. Satan is powerful and holds his captives just as he held this one:

Luke 13:11-12 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. (12) When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”

The sinner will, of course, boast of his “freedom.” He or she insists that they have “freedom of the will.” Freedom to choose. But this is a lie. Every human being outside of Christ is imprisoned in a fortress from which no one has ever or will ever escape...*unless someone greater than Satan frees them.*

What does this prison look like? We think of metal bars and thick

walls and concertina wire. But just what are these fortresses which hold the captives made of? Paul tells us-

2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

- Arguments
- Lofty opinions
- Thoughts
- All of which are raised *against the knowledge of God*

What do these all have in common? THE MIND. Just listen to the sinner when God’s truth comes along. They present *arguments against that knowledge. They express their lofty opinions against that knowledge. They share their thinking which opposes the knowledge of God.* And they boast that this is all “wisdom.” It is, in fact, a prison of darkness, impregnable and from which there is no escape to be found in this world.

Here is just one such example of this prison of the mind:

“It is surprising to note how every person imagines himself or herself to be an infallible authority on this matter of salvation. ‘I cannot believe that God would do so and so,’ says the person, and therefore would have us believe, quite definitely, that God does not do so and so. If we cannot believe it – well, it just does not happen! For we are all authorities on this matter.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ is not something which offers itself to us for debate or discussion, but for our definite acceptance and belief. Jesus did not lead discussions, He gave instructions. In other words, if we are really serious about this matter of salvation, and not simply out to be clever, our business is not to express our own opinions and thoughts but to discover the mind of God. That can alone be found in the Bible.” (Lloyd-Jones, Evangelistic Sermons, Banner of Truth Trust]

The imprisoned mind will never get that far however. It will remain its own authority because it is the devil’s prisoner:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Understand? Not only is Satan’s prison inescapable, *it is plunged in total darkness*. A darkness more terrible than any night – a darkness *of the mind*. A darkness which is designed to prevent ANY truth about Christ from penetrating.

Here is still another example of this prison of the mind. The Word of God is proclaimed and the sinner, if left unaffected by the Holy Spirit, will often respond with “Oh, that is just soooo narrow. I cannot believe that God is like that. You Christians are a very narrow, black and white people. For myself, I

prefer to be open-minded and wide in my thinking. Surely Christ is not the only way of salvation.” If you, even as a Christian, do not take care, you might find yourself frightened by this accusation of “narrowness.”

IV. Where Then is the Hope?

“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...”

How did Paul wage war? Wherein was this divine power which he used blow up the prison walls and free the captives? We need not wonder:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The enemies at Corinth, just as the enemies with churches today do, said that Paul’s speech was “of no account.”(vs 10) But that, as we have seen, only demonstrates that a person is still in the devil’s prison, their mind blinded in darkness. In truth, Paul’s Word was the very divinely powerful weapon which is the sinner’s only means of being set free.

Isaiah 55:10-11 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, (11) so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

1 Peter 1:23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Jeremiah 23:29 Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and

like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

The ONLY way of escape is for God's Word to come to the sinner, empowered by His Spirit, to break the bonds and smash the stone walls, effecting the new birth and creating a brand new mind. *The people sitting in darkness must see a great Light.*

Let's conclude with two important applications of these things:

First, these words MUST define all of our methods in the church. It is the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and His Word alone, that will be the weapon which is effective against the enemy and for the salvation of sinners.

Consider carefully just how arrogant we are when we decide that we can create programs and settings which will "save" sinners. God's true weapons in this warfare are going to be *regarded as weakness and foolishness to the world.* And yet these weapons are divinely powerful with that same

power which said "Let there be light" and there was light.

It is God's Word, the preaching of the gospel as empowered by the Spirit of God which is THE effective weapon is tearing down strongholds and setting prisoners free. We do not need to be constantly pressured to invent other methods in order to "succeed."

Second, consider how foolish we are *when we neglect the only key to escape from Satan's bondage.* Do you remember Christian when he and Hopeful were imprisoned by Giant Despair in the dungeon? And why did they linger there for as long as they did? *Because they forgot that they had to key to escape all along – the Word of God.*

We are just as foolish when we neglect the ONLY key which is empowered by God to set us free from Satan's enslaving lies. For example – and I have been guilty of this myself in my younger years – how often do we fail to gather together as Christ's church and

hear the ministry of God's Word? Think about this very carefully. God's Word is this weapon that is divinely powerful for our salvation, but are we not often just like the Count of Monte Cristo in that horrible, inescapable dungeon, *if he had ignored the means of his escape?*

Just think how terrible is the plight of anyone whose mind is help captive by Satan? You might say, well, yes, but what can they do? They are prisoners. There is no human means of escape. But there IS something the sinner can do:

- He can pick up his Bible and read it like a dying man reading about a cure
- He can take advantage of the HUGE privilege we have these days of hearing God's Word preached on the internet
- He can faithfully gather on the Lord's Day to hear the Word of God taught and preached.
- And he can PRAY, asking the Lord, "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner."

No one can argue that they cannot do those things. The Lord Jesus said that the Way is *narrow* that leads to life, and few are they who find it. But He also said *strive to enter that gate! STRIVE!* Take it by violence. Press through it. How? By reading and hearing the Word of God. By pleading with the Lord for salvation. We have His sure promise:

"Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved."