

## Message #26

## II Corinthians 10:1-6

Recently, I received an invitation to attend a church conference in Atlanta sponsored by a group that calls themselves “The rethink Group.” They have determined that one word is the key to an impacting ministry and the word is “focus.” They state that focus is a reason Joshua won the battle, Nehemiah finished the wall and Daniel got a promotion. The conference is designed to form strategies and have workshops that supposedly are transformational to the church. It is designed to increase momentum and increase vision. It is designed to come up with a formula for success. Now there were three things that I found interesting about this. **First**, none of the people on the list who are heading this up are great Bible teachers, but they are great promoters who are involved in “ministries” that feature a lot of numbers. **Second**, not one of the workshops listed in the brochure promoted the idea of very carefully studying God’s Word so that we accurately understand every bit of it. **Third**, the total emphasis is that humans can do it. They can focus, plan it and achieve it. I did not see the fact that we cannot do one thing without the power of God. It was a very professional, slick marketing strategy that is designed to make the church big.

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul putting together some conference designed to discuss workshop ideas and come up with fun strategies to get people to come to church? Can you imagine the Apostle Paul even being invited to speak at one of these conferences? There was not one thing about him that looked impressive. He did not have a polished set of technical rhetoric skills. He was not what you would call successful by today’s mega-church mindset. He was meek, humble and poor. He did not have any focused marketing techniques, but what he did have was a tremendous grasp of God’s Word and he did have the power of God in his life. This was a man who knew God and walked with God and he did have victory over his flesh. He lived a victorious Christian life.

**When Paul writes these final four chapters of II Corinthians he wants the people to realize that he is a true apostle of God with the true power of God.** There were many false accusers who were trying to undermine Paul, and Paul wanted the people to realize that they are nothing more than slick satanic marketers. The real problem of our day, which was the same problem in Paul’s day, is that many believers don’t realize the nature of the war that we are in and don’t have a clue as to how to win it. They are being brainwashed by a bunch of religious leaders who seem to have big followings. In this section Paul defends himself and what he says is this:

**COMPARED TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO APPEAR TO BE SUCCESSFUL, PAUL DIDN’T LOOK VERY IMPRESSIVE; BUT HE WAS A TRUE SOLDIER FOR JESUS CHRIST AND HE HAD THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND SPIRITUAL VICTORY IN HIS LIFE AND WAS WINNING THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE.**

Make no mistake about this; the issue that is at stake in our spiritual life is an issue of war. We are in spiritual war. We are in war against our own flesh and war against flesh philosophies and flesh people.

**APOSTOLIC POINT #1** – Paul explains the reason for his meek and mild demeanor. **10:1-2**

Paul was being criticized by his accusers as one who could write big and powerful things, but was nothing when in person. It is obvious that Paul took this very personal because the words “I Paul myself” are very emphatic in Greek.

Paul did not come across as some dominant figure that walked into a room and commanded the attention of everyone in it. He did not come across as the leading apostle of the Grace Age. He didn't wear the “clergy clothing” and he didn't have the typical “clergy look.” He was the kind of man who would slip into a service and sit in the back row and not go up on the platform and strut around with a mindset that said “look at me.” **The reason he behaved this way is because that is the way Jesus Christ acted when He was here on earth.**

When he was with the Corinthians he demonstrated a Christ-like “meekness” and “gentleness.” Now the word “meekness” (πραυτης) is one that emphasizes a very gentle and meek demeanor (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 377). Paul was not a pushy and dominant minister.

The word “gentleness” (επιεικης) emphasizes a fair moderation, a sweet reasonableness (*Ibid.*, p. 169). The fact that Jesus Christ demonstrated this kind of spirit does seem to take the wind out of the sails of those who are harsh and dominant.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth the first time, He did not look like the Second member of the Trinity. Isaiah predicted that He would have no stately form or majesty (Is. 53:2). Jesus did not look like some strong, dominant person who looked like He belonged in the NFL. He did not come across as some pushy person who gave people a list of rules and regulations. He was meek and mild just like Paul.

These words mean that Paul dealt with the Corinthians in the same way. He was not some rigid, legalistic Pharisee who tried to dominate them. It is amazing that when it comes to religion, the majority of people tend to be drawn toward loud, rigid, legalistic people who operate by strict codes and rules. That is the way the Judaizers were. They put on their religious clothes and they demanded attention. As Dr. Wiersbe said, the Judaizers were overbearing and the people loved them (*Be Encouraged*, p. 109). Paul was gentle and kind to people and was being criticized and questioned because of it.

Paul knew what his enemies were saying about him. He knew they were saying that Paul was meek and mild when with them, but when not with them he would write bold and scathing things. The false teachers were saying he is only bold when he is penning his “paper bullets,” but he doesn't dare to be bold to your face.

At the time Paul lived, being a meek and gentle person seemed to be a sign of weakness. Some people like strong leaders who dominate, who operate by rigid strict rules and codes. Paul was not like that at all.

In **verse 2**, Paul says I don't want to have to be bold when I am present with you. Paul says I can be a very courageous and tough man when I need to be. I can especially be very tough on those who are making false allegations against me. In fact, Paul says when some people say that I am dominated by the flesh and not by the Spirit, I propose that they will see just how bold I can be.

Paul was not afraid to take on anyone. He was not afraid to get in people's faces when he needed to. But that was not the way he typically operated. He was not usually some dominant type of minister. He was gracious, meek, mild and kind.

**APOSTOLIC POINT #2** – Paul explains real spiritual warfare. **10:3-6**

We may observe that in these verses, Paul uses several military terms—"war" (v. 3); "weapons"; "warfare"; "destruction"; "fortresses" (v. 4); "destroying"; "captives" (v. 5). The terms are military terms but the way one actually wins this war is completely by what we would call "unconventional warfare."

**Point #1** - Real winning warfare is not by the flesh. **10:3**

False teachers promote the idea that you win the spiritual warfare by your own flesh. All you have to do is to come up with a series of flesh rules and codes and that is how you win. Just follow the rules and follow the codes and the rituals and you end up a champion. Paul says no, that is not how you win and it is not how it works.

Here is one of the most important points and one of the most misunderstood points of Grace Age theology. **You cannot and will not ever win by depending on your own flesh.** The warfare we face is against our flesh and will never be won by our flesh. Our flesh will fail us every single time.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer said, "the flesh is incurably and hopelessly bad, and only bad." He also said "Probably there is no more subtle delusion common among believers than the supposition that the saved man, if he tries hard enough, can, on the basis of the fact that he is regenerate, overcome his flesh" (*Bib Sac*, Oct. 1935, pp. 404-405).

Paul understood this principle because he is the apostle who developed it. You do not win the spiritual warfare by your flesh. In fact, he was the one who said that a key to spiritual victory is recognizing that "nothing good dwells in me" (Rom. 7:18).

No one will ever have spiritual victory by promising they will try harder or that they will try to do better, because our flesh will never do better. Our flesh is not just prone to sin and fail, it loves to sin and fail. Paul realized you cannot achieve spiritual victory by flesh rules and legalism.

**Point #2** - Real winning warfare is not flesh-empowered, but God-empowered. **10:4**

The Authorized Version does a better job here of translating the Greek when it reads that our weapons of warfare are “mighty through God.” The ability to have victory over strongholds that dominate our flesh comes from God. The might and power come from Him.

**Spiritual victory only comes by dependency on God and by a close relationship with Him. Our spiritual victory will never be found in our sinful insufficiency, but in our total dependency on the sufficient God.**

Paul knew the secret of victory and that came from a close relationship with God. Having a close, personal and intimate relationship with God is not something the religious leaders of Paul’s day had, but Paul certainly did have it.

He knew that the weapons of warfare were not of the flesh, but by empowerment of God. That word “empowerment” (δυνατοζ) refers to a strong might and power that only comes from God for the purpose of “the destruction of fortresses.” The word “fortress” (οχυρωμα) speaks of something that has a stronghold affect (*Ibid.*, p. 331).

I understand Paul to be saying that the empowerment that enables us to destroy the things that have a stronghold affect on our flesh is an empowerment that comes from God.

I do not know what particular stronghold dominates your flesh. Paul gives us a list of things in Galatians 5:19-21: things immoral, things impure, things sensual, things idolatrous or things demonic. You may be dominated by jealousy, anger, envy, dissensions, drunkenness or factions. I don’t know what has a stronghold on you, but what I do know is that **the only way for you to have victory is by empowerment that comes from God.**

God stands ready to divinely empower His soldiers to the point that they can destroy fortresses. God has given His soldiers to fight and defeat principalities and powers that we cannot even see that dominate our flesh.

Now Paul had this power. Paul demonstrated this power. People were criticizing him and he was a very disciplined and powerful man of God who was winning the warfare because he had empowerment that came from God.

**Point #3** - Real winning warfare destroys speculations by the knowledge of God. **10:5a**

It is obvious that one of the biggest enemies that Paul faced was the world of vain speculation and arrogant lofty concepts. In fact, the words “lofty things raised up” (υψωμα επαρομενον) literally describe proud and arrogant concepts that are against God and a barrier to having a relationship with God (*Ibid.*, pp. 163, 465).

We live in a world of arrogant concepts that are lifted up and presented as great ideals which are totally and completely alienated from God. Now carefully observe how Paul overcame these things—by knowledge of the Word of God.

**Paul’s key weapon while living in a world of all kinds of secular and religious opinions and views and philosophies was the knowledge of God and His Word.** In fact, our first weapon is the truth of the Word of God (Eph. 6:14) and the sword we have to fight with is knowledge of the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

Paul did not just win arguments; he destroyed his opposition by his knowledge of God and His Word. Winning warfare must know the Scriptures to the point that one may use the Scriptures to attack speculations and lofty concepts.

One commentator made a very interesting observation. He said that he did not think that the devil was right now really attacking the Word of God. In fact, there seems to be a real interest in the Word of God. There are seminars and retreats and all kinds of Bible studies.

But here is the thing that is lacking—real knowledge. It is one thing to be interested in the Word of God, but it is quite another to have real knowledge of what is in the Word of God. That is what Paul had and that is why he was so powerful.

**Point #4** - Real winning warfare brings every thought captive through obeying Christ. **10:5b**

No one can accomplish this by their flesh. The person who literally is striving to bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ is not only very knowledgeable of God’s Word, but also very much in tune with the Spirit of God.

Now the word for “thought” (νοῦμα) not only has to do with what one thinks, but also with what one purposes or designs to do (*Ibid.*, pp. 303-304). Paul purposed with his mind to lead every thought into obedience to God. He purposed to filter every thought which would lead to actions through the Scriptures and line them up with the Word of God that would obey Jesus Christ.

**Point #5** - Real winning warfare is ready to punish all disobedience . **10:6**

The word “punish” is one that means to vindicate and avenge all disobedience. Paul was prepared to come to Corinth and deliver a punishment to those who claimed that he was walking by the flesh. He could be tough but He hoped he did not have to do that.

When one is having spiritual victory, one wants to do something about disobedience first and foremost in one’s own life.

Real spiritual victory is ready to punish all disobedience. When one is ready to judge all disobedience in one’s life, one is complete in obedience.