

# 13. The Weapons of Paul's Warfare

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Date: 21 July 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible reading for this morning. As I said, we're back in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. And I don't have the page number for our church visitors' Bibles.

Maybe somebody can shout it out when you find it. 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Anyone got the page, Edward? Page 968, if you have one of our visitors' Bibles.

Otherwise, you'll find it near the end of your Bible, wherever that is. And we're going to read the whole of 2 Corinthians chapter 10.

Paul, you'll remember, has been writing this long letter to the church at Corinth, answering some of the questions that they have been writing to him, and dealing with some difficult subjects.

You'll know it's not an easy letter. Neither of these letters to this church are easy letters. And here Paul again. takes up his pleading with the Corinthians.

[ 1 : 05 ] Some have come into the church there and have been denigrating Paul, saying all sorts of things about him. He's very bold when he's absent, but he's like a lamb when he's with us.

All this kind of thing. And Paul now is speaking once again to this church that he loves, with honesty, with great faithfulness.

I, Paul, myself, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. I, who am humble when face to face with you, and bold when I'm away.

I beg of you, that when I'm 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. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

[ 2 : 11 ] We destroy arguments, and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God. We 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, so are we.

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, and his speech is of no account.

Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when we are absent, we do when present. Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves.

[ 3 : 24 ] When they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they're without understanding. But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God has assigned to us, to reach even to you.

For we are not overextending ourselves as though we did not reach you. We were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others, but our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence.

that the one who boasts, that the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Amen. And may God bless us this, his word. All right, well, let's bow our heads and we'll pray now to the Lord.

Dear God, our Father, we remember that wonderful verse in the Psalms that tells us that the unfolding of your words brings light. And we confess to you, dear Father, that our hearts and our minds are very often groping about in the darkness and we need your light.

[ 5 : 12 ] So please have mercy upon us. Teach us the truths of your holy word as we've just sung and help us, we pray, to know you better and to learn how to live for you more truly.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10, page 968 in our church Bibles.

And as Willie has told us already this morning, our plan is to look at chapter 10 today. I want to take the first six verses today and then look at the rest of the chapter next week.

Then we'll have a bit more of a break and then come back to 2 Corinthians. And I'm hoping, God willing, to finish it off, or it'll finish us off one way or the other, but to finish it off in the five Sunday evenings in September.

And we'll turn to the final three chapters. Dick Lucas asked me a little while ago what I was working on in my preaching at present.

[ 6 : 16 ] And I said to him, 2 Corinthians. And when he heard that, he gave me a gentle and rather penetrating look. And he said, ah, yes, 2 Corinthians, brother. Paul's most difficult letter.

Now, I think he was right to say that. It is a difficult letter, but it's also a very wonderful letter. And as I've tried to come to terms with 2 Corinthians over the last few months, I've come to see what a close bearing it has on the contemporary churches, on the churches of today.

I say that because in this letter, Paul is engaged in a titanic struggle between two incompatible world views, two incompatible views of life.

One is the view represented by the false apostles at Corinth, this group of men who had infiltrated the church at Corinth from outside and whose teaching, although no doubt dressed up in some of the language of Christianity, was at heart anti-Christian, devilish and worldly.

And then on the other hand, we have the other view represented and taught by Paul, which is not worldly, but from heaven and teaches the real gospel of Christ. Now, our churches today are always going to be engaged in exactly the same kind of struggle between two incompatible views.

[ 7 : 35 ] On the one hand, we're pressed by the world's agenda, which seeks to conform us to itself and to accommodate us to its values and its way of life.

In fact, in the prayers a moment ago, Willie spoke of, prayed about the queen and the way in which she is obviously under this great pressure to be conformed to the way of life of the world.

So that's going to be one pressure. But on the other hand, we are addressed by the Bible, which urges us to be transformed by its teaching and values and to live our lives not by the standards of this world, but by the message brought to us by the spokesmen of God, that is the apostles, the prophets, and supremely by the Lord Jesus himself.

Now, you may be a new Christian or perhaps still quite a young Christian here today, and you may not yet quite have grasped that the Church of Christ is engaged in just this kind of battle.

But it always has been and it always will be. It's a battle that is sometimes very wearying and demanding, but sometimes strangely exhilarating as we seek to bring the glorious gospel into the citadels of worldly influence.

[ 8 : 47 ] And of course, as soon as a particular church, a local church congregation, ceases to struggle with the influences of the godless world, as soon as it begins to accommodate itself to the world's agenda, it ceases to be truly a Christian church.

It may continue to use the language of Christianity, but it becomes evacuated of the power of heaven. Now, in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verses 3 and 4, have a look with me at those verses, chapter 10 verses 3 and 4, you'll see that Paul writes about waging war and using the weapons of our warfare.

And the warfare that he's engaged in is just the kind of battling that I've been trying to describe. So let me briefly remind you first of what is going on in Corinth. The year is something like 56 AD.

Paul had planted the church at Corinth in about 50 AD, about six years previously, and initially he'd spent the best part of two years there in Corinth teaching the gospel and building up the church to know the Lord better and to know how to live the Christian life.

But then Paul, as he so often did, had to move on to other work. He then crossed the Aegean Sea. He went to the city of Ephesus, where again he spent a couple of years building up a new church, and then he moved on to other work in other places.

[10:08] But Paul took a huge continuing interest in the churches that he had planted, and he kept as closely in touch with them as he possibly could, as you could before the days of email or carrier pigeons.

And anyway, word began to reach the apostle that all was not too well with the congregation at Corinth. They were splitting up into various factions. They were turning a blind eye to sexual immorality.

They were behaving selfishly and unlovingly. They were becoming proud and arrogant. And possibly worst of all, they were beginning to distance themselves from Paul and his leadership. And Paul had to address these problems in the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians. Then another year or two elapsed, and news again reached Paul that a group of influential leaders, who clearly came from a Jewish background, had come from somewhere else.

They'd established themselves in Corinth. They'd come into the congregation. They didn't have a proper understanding of the gospel, and yet they claimed to be apostles of Christ.

[11:13] And because these men were gifted speakers with powerful personalities, they began to draw the Corinthian Christians, or at least some of the Corinthian Christians, away from Paul and towards their own brand of religion, which Paul could see was not true Christianity at all.

Now just look how Paul describes these people in chapter 11, verses 13 and 14 and 15. 11, 13. Such men, he says, are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. So these men are claiming to be Christians.

They're claiming, more than that, to be apostles of Christ. But really, Paul says, they're servants of Satan. Deceit and disguise have always been the hallmarks of Satan, and therefore they're going to show up in his servants.

Well, let's turn our magnifying glass on these first six verses of chapter 10, where we're going to learn something about Paul and something about the nature and power of the gospel.

[12:24] And I want to take this section under two headings. First of all, we'll look at a wrong view of Paul, and secondly, at a right view of the gospel.

First then, a wrong view of Paul. Now, Paul is painfully aware that his name is being tarnished, and his reputation and character are being misrepresented, primarily by these false apostles.

But Paul realizes that some of the Corinthian Christians are also being heavily influenced by these false leaders and are beginning to think wrongly about Paul. So how is Paul wrongly viewed and misrepresented?

Let me mention three things. First of all, he's being charged with inconsistency. Now, we'll leave our passage just for a moment, and we'll quickly get back to it.

But look at verse 10 in our chapter. Chapter 10, verse 10. For they say his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak.

[13:25] In other words, he talks himself up in his letters, he blusters and threatens and throws his weight about and says what a tough disciplinarian he's going to be when he's at a safe distance.

But when you meet him, he's rather a weedy little specimen. He'll sit there in a corner drinking weak tea and not saying boo to a goose. In short, he is inconsistent.

He's tough on paper, but he's weak and watery in the flesh. Now, we know from our modern day, think of the kind of exchanges that take place in the House of Commons sometimes.

We know how a charge of inconsistency can be a powerful accusation. We hear this kind of thing sometimes on the radio. Two years ago, the leader of the party opposite said such and such.

You can look it up in Hansard, page 3033, section 49. And now, he is saying the precise, diametric, categoric opposite. And I say to this house that a leader like that is a weak leader.

[14:25] He is inconsistent. Well, well, well, well, well, well, well, well, well. And that's what they were saying about Paul. And Paul rebuts this charge head on in verse 11.

Have a look at verse 11. Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. We're not inconsistent, he's saying. So he rebuts the charge.

But that's what they're saying about him. Then secondly, they're charging Paul with being a poor speaker. Verse 10 again. His speech is of no account.

And in fact, if you look across to chapter 11, verse 6, you'll see that Paul willingly concedes that he may be at one level an unskilled speaker.

Now, at another level, it's obvious, surely, that Paul was a very skillful speaker. You've only got to read his letters. You've only got to read the sermons that are written down as preached by him in the Acts of the Apostles to realize that Paul was a master of persuasive logic and argument.

[15:29] But he was clearly unwilling to conform his manner of speaking to the standards of oratory that were so much valued in first century Greek culture. In first century Greece, when people had the afternoon off work, a bit like our Saturday afternoons, they didn't go to football matches and watch football because there wasn't football.

They would flock in great crowds to hear philosophical debates. And then having spent two or three hours listening to speakers debating things with each other, they would then, as they walked home, they would discuss the skill and brilliance of their leading orators in much the same way that you and I might discuss the skill of Wayne Rooney and Lionel Messi.

Now, Paul had no wish to go in for public speaking of that kind. He didn't want people to be praising him as a fine speaker. He wanted them to understand the good news about the Lord Jesus.

That was his interest. We sometimes say this to our Cornhill Training Course students. Brother, don't try to be a great preacher, but make sure that you preach about a great God. You see the difference?

It's the Lord and the message which are so important, not that people should say what a fine preacher that young man is. Paul had no desire to be talked up as a great orator.

[16:45] No doubt he spoke with passion, but he had no desire to, if you like, tick the boxes of the golden-tongued orators. He had something much more important to do than to put himself forward.

As he says in this very letter in chapter 4, verse 5, what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. Now the problem was that these false apostles at Corinth clearly valued their oratory and they fancied themselves as fine orators.

And they began to persuade the Corinthians that Paul was of little account because he was not much of an orator. So, first of all, Paul's opponents charge him with being inconsistent, secondly, with being a poor speaker, and thirdly, with being merely human, merely human.

Now we haven't yet grappled with what Paul is actually saying in verses 1 and 2 and we're going to come back to that in a moment. But at this stage, let's notice towards the end of verse 2 that there are some people who are suspecting us and therefore no doubt accusing us of walking according to the flesh, which means merely conducting our lives in the most humdrum, low-level human fashion. Now the Apostle Paul doesn't always use that word flesh in exactly the same way. Very often, usually, I guess, he means by the flesh humanity in all its fallenness and egocentricity and self-reliance and godlessness.

[18:19] But here it's a bit different. The word isn't carrying quite that same freight. Here, Paul simply means humdrum humanness as opposed to something more vital and exalted and spiritual, which is the way that the false apostles clearly thought of themselves.

In fact, Paul tells us quite a bit in this letter about the false apostles and how they view themselves. They clearly regarded themselves as big shots in the spiritual realm.

How do we know this? Well, first of all, they came to Corinth with letters of recommendation in their kit bags, glowing testimonials to their spiritual standing.

Remember how Paul said to the Corinthians back in chapter 3 that he didn't need letters of recommendation because the Corinthians themselves were his letter of recommendation.

The power of Paul's gospel work was evident in their changed lives. He didn't need somebody to write some kind of glowing testimonial for him because the Corinthians themselves fulfilled that role.

[19:22] Then secondly, these false leaders seem to be requiring to have large fees or salaries paid for their work. Look on to chapter 11 verses 7 and 8.

11-7. Did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might become exalted because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.

Now the implication is that these false apostles were saying that Paul was clearly not much of a leader because he wasn't even charging a fee. You dear batty Corinthians, you get what you pay for.

Rolls Royces don't come cheap. If you have a man here who charges nothing for his services, he must be worth nothing. And thirdly, there's the business of fine oratory which I've spoken about already.

And then fourthly, these false apostles were priding themselves on their experiences and visions and revelations. And that's why Paul most unwillingly in chapter 12 has to explain that he too has been given heavenly visions of things too wonderful for him to talk about.

[ 20 : 34 ] He's not wanting to press his claims in this way but he feels that he has to so as to show the Corinthians that he is a true apostle and that God has revealed himself to him. So the false leaders, they're clearly putting themselves forward as rather glorious, superior individuals, spiritual people.

People whose spiritual status was attested by weighty letters of recommendation, fat fees or salaries paid to them for their work, beautifully delivered oratorical performances and visions and revelations not granted to lower forms of humanity such as, for example, the apostle Paul.

And if we'd been able to ask one of these exalted beings, superior beings, what he thought of Paul, I guess he would have said, Paul, oh dear, dear, dear, such an ordinary little man, merely human, lives life according to the flesh, doesn't have the power to reach any higher than that.

So the view of Paul which the false apostles are holding and introducing into the thinking of the Corinthians is that he's inconsistent, he's a poor speaker, he's nothing more than a low-octane human being and therefore not really worth listening to.

And that brand of thinking about the apostle Paul is not dead. You'll find versions of it from John O'Groats to Land's End and from Greenland to Tasmania.

[ 22 : 07 ] Now, with all that in mind, let's grapple with what Paul is actually saying to the Corinthians in verses 1 and 2. He's asking them here in verses 1 and 2 to begin to deal with the false apostles before he personally comes to them at Corinth.

He's wanting them to shut down the influence of these false apostles. It's not that Paul is frightened of doing this himself when he next comes to Corinth. But he wants the church, he wants the congregation to take corporate responsibility for closing off the influence of these false teachers. Now, look at the verbs that Paul uses here. Verse 1, I entreat you. And verse 2, I beg of you. So, what is this earnest request?

Verse 2. Verse 2 is a tricky verse, but I think what he means is this. I beg of you that when I am present, when I have finally managed to get to Corinth, I may not have to show boldness or fierceness, that is disciplinary fierceness, with such confidence or forcefulness as I reckon I might have to show to the people who suspect us and accuse us of just living our life in a weak and human way.

So, do you see what verse 2 means? I'm asking you, Corinthians, I'm begging you to act now. Take responsibility. Don't think that it's appropriate to leave all this disciplinary work to me.

[ 23 : 34 ] Yes, I will play the tough disciplinarian with these people if I have to. I won't shrink from it if it's necessary. But if you will act now to silence these people, I shan't have to deploy the full range of my apostolic weaponry against these wretched people when I come to Corinth.

Now, friends, let me draw a parallel. Many of you will remember, because you were there, that highly charged meeting that we had in the old church at Buchanan Street with the Church of Scotland authorities in March of last year, March 2012.

If you were there, you will never forget it. At that meeting, our congregation took responsibility to silence what was becoming obviously a false gospel.

It was a harrowing meeting and yet rather thrilling. And I say thrilling because dozens of you, dozens, one after another, stood up, came to the microphone and spoke out in defense of the biblical gospel.

Some of you gave testimonies about how you'd come to the Lord yourself. Some argued from biblical texts. But what you did that evening was in effect to shut down and cut off the influence of a false gospel which was masquerading as Christianity.

[ 24 : 51 ] but you did it, you people. You didn't leave it to the minister or to the senior elders. As you know, our minister is no shrinking violet. But he hardly had to say a word that evening, did he?

Because the congregation took courage, found its voice, and opposed what we knew was false. Now that's what Paul is asking and begging the Corinthians to do now in his absence.

And do you notice an astonishing element there? Verse 1, I pull myself and treat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

I who am allegedly humble when face to face with you but bold and fierce and tough towards you when I'm away. Well, I'm going to confound that accusation at once and prove to you that I'm actually gentle towards you when absent.

As gentle as Christ himself. Now what is Paul getting at here in verse 1? Is Jesus gentle? Is he meek? He did say in Matthew 11, take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

[ 26 : 00 ] But how gentle was he when he took a whip of cords and drove out the money changers from the temple? And how gentle was he being with the Pharisees in Matthew 23 when he said to them, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

You're like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all manner of uncleanness. Isn't the reality that Christ is infinitely gentle and lovely towards those who come to him and repent and trust him and submit to him but to those who refuse him and rebel against him like those money changers like the Pharisees, he must in the end be unrelentingly fierce.

And don't the apostles take their cue from him wonderfully loving and gentle to the Lord's people but inevitably fierce in the end to those who oppose the gospel.

In fact, we see this in this very letter, Paul's wonderful love towards the Corinthians but his implacable hostility towards these false apostles who won't submit to Christ.

So here in our verse 1 in chapter 10, isn't he saying to the Corinthians, think of the meekness and gentleness of Christ towards you, how he has accepted you and forgiven you and loved you.

[ 27 : 20 ] He would have been eternally fierce towards you if you had not come to him, but he's drawn you wonderfully to himself with infinite kindness. I beseech you therefore because of this kindness and gentleness from Christ to defend his honor by opposing those who oppose him.

Don't you owe it to him to stand with him in this way? So there's our first point. Paul shows his Corinthian Christian friends how he is being misrepresented and scorned.

He's saying to them, we're in a battle, you must understand the truth about me because I'm Christ's true representative. If you believe the false apostles account of me, you'll find that you're no longer on the side of Christ.

That's the implication. Well, let's turn now from a wrong view of Paul to our second section, which I'm calling a right view of the gospel. And the right view of the gospel that Paul is putting forward here is that the gospel is an array of divine weaponry deployed by the Lord and his servants.

If verse four here is a verse that you don't know well, do let me encourage you to memorize it and get it deep into the bloodstream. It's a great verse. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

[ 28 : 47 ] Now, why does Paul speak like this at this point in his letter? The answer is because he's being accused of being a weak man, a man who simply walks according to the flesh and therefore is a man of no consequence.

He is saying, on the contrary, we who hold the true gospel have a wonderful and powerful range of weapons. They're not the weapons of the flesh. They're not the weapons of mere human oratory.

Still less are they the weapons of armed force. But they're weapons that have divine power to destroy strongholds. And what are these strongholds that sometimes have to be destroyed?

Well, Paul explains in the very next verse. In verse five, we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

So the heart of these arguments and opinions is that they are, verse five, against the knowledge of God. Now these arguments and opinions will come at people like us in many forms.

[ 29 : 53 ] Some of them will deny the existence of God altogether. Others will affirm the existence of God but deny that the Bible's account of him is true. Non-Christian faiths typically will fall into that category, affirming the existence of a supreme deity but denying that he's revealed himself uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ.

And you'll see there's a telling word there in verse five which characterizes these anti-God arguments and opinions and that is the word lofty. I think there's more than a touch of sarcasm in that word.

Paul is saying that those who oppose the gospel tend to do it from a lofty position. You can only fire broadsides at the gospel by exalting yourself to a place of eminence.

The heart of what you're saying is I know better than these pygmy thinkers, these silly little Christians. I'm a superior and enlightened thinker. And those who set themselves to argue against Christianity don't usually do it in a calm and level-headed way.

Their normal tactic is to speak and write contemptuously to look down at the gospel from a lofty height. So for example, a writer like Professor Richard Dawkins, to him, Christians are not merely wrong-headed, they're deluded.

[ 31 : 14 ] Or to give another example, there was a well-known professor of philosophy at Oxford University a generation or so ago, whose name was A.J. Ayer, Freddie Ayer. And he once wrote of the Christian understanding of the cross, the Christian understanding of vicarious atonement, as being both intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous.

Can you imagine that? You can only use phrases like that if you have exalted yourself to a very lofty height. Now, Paul is saying here in verses 4 and 5 that the gospel has the power not merely to oppose that kind of argument but to destroy it, to demolish it.

And haven't many of us found that's exactly what has happened in our own experience? I imagine quite a few of us here at one time in our life cherished anti-God, anti-Bible opinions.

What we were really doing, of course, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, was hiding from God. We didn't want to know him or to submit to the Lordship of Christ. But rather than admit that that was the real issue, we did our best to argue against the Bible.

So we would argue, for example, that science has disproved the Bible or that anthropology has disproved the Bible or that the latest researches of psychology, genetics, physiology, and biology are incompatible with the Bible's teaching about the nature of man.

[ 32 : 39 ] In fact, we tried every trick in the book so as to persuade other people, although principally to persuade ourselves, that Christianity was wrong until finally we realized that we didn't have a leg to stand on, that the arguments and lofty opinions and evasions that we'd been relying on were rather like sandcastles before the incoming tide.

And it was then that we capitulated. We acknowledged finally that God is God and that Christ is the only Savior, that the Bible is true and trustworthy.

And what a relief and joy it was to us to get to that point. And ever since that capitulation or our conversion, we've had the further joy, in the final words of verse 5, of having every thought taken captive to obey Christ.

The whole of our mental furniture has been and continues to be rearranged so that our minds, by the grace of God, increasingly reflect the thinking of Christ himself.

But you'll see that Paul is not just talking in a kind of vacuum about the power of the gospel to demolish anti-God arguments. He's also making a point for the Corinthians in their particular situation.

[ 33 : 52 ] And that comes in verse 6, that Paul's divine weaponry is ready, is poised to punish the disobedience of the false apostles and any of the Corinthians who've gone with them, once the obedience of the other Corinthians is followed through, which is only going to happen when they take corporate responsibility to silence the false apostles.

apostles. So the destruction of anti-God arguments and lofty opinions is not only going to happen to people who hold them, who are outside the church, it will also be brought to bear upon those like the false apostles who claim to be Christians and even Christian leaders, but actually are false leaders.

Well, friends, time is almost up, but I want to draw to a close now by raising an important question. And that question is, how far are you and I prepared to follow the apostle Paul?

Here he is, unambiguously telling the Corinthians that he's engaged in warfare. The establishing of the gospel in the hearts of men and women is a process of warfare.

Paul and those who follow him are doing battle with the lies that are told by the enemy. about Christ and the Bible. Now, as you'll know, this is by no means the only place in Paul's letters where he writes of warfare.

[ 35 : 17 ] Famously, in Ephesians chapter 6, he tells the Christians of Ephesus to put on the whole armor of God so as to be able to stand, to remain standing against the schemes of the devil.

He tells Timothy in his very last letter, 2 Timothy chapter 4, I have fought the good fight. Jesus pictures himself as the mighty warrior who ties up the strong man, the devil, and renders him impotent.

Now, the question is, are we willing to go with Paul and to see ourselves as engaged in a struggle, in fact, in a war? I guess typically, Christians will fall into two groups.

First, those who are willing to do battle for the cause of Christ. Christ. And then secondly, those who are content to receive the blessings of the gospel, but are not willing to engage in the warfare that real gospel work entails.

It's a decisive moment when a person moves from the second group into the first. I can remember when I was a young minister, perhaps age 30 or so, an older friend of mine said to me, Edward, you believe the gospel, but will you be willing to contend for the gospel?

[ 36 : 33 ] That question shook me. But it's the question raised by Paul here, surely, in 2 Corinthians 10. In the words of verse 4, the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh.

They're not merely human weapons. Now, that's encouraging. It means we don't have to turn ourselves into invincible debaters. Still less do we try to force people or coerce them into obeying Christ.

In the past, Christians have even taken up arms and have tried to Christianize other nations at the point of the sword. Well, that was never Christ's way. It's never been the way of his apostles either. And yet, real Bible faith will always involve us in warfare. We're engaged in battle for the minds, the souls, and the destinies of men and women.

What are our weapons? The Bible, the gospel, the power of prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have nothing else. But it's by means of those weapons that people's lives are turned around, bringing them understanding where there was confusion, hope, where there was despair, salvation, where there was only the prospect of judgment, and life, where there was only the prospect of the road to death.

[ 37 : 59 ] We are called to this kind of warfare. Let's not shrink from it, and let's not be ashamed of it, because it is the way of Paul and the way of the Lord Jesus.

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.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we remember gladly that the church on earth is the church militant.

We have a message to proclaim which does battle with the deceit and lies of the devil. We thank you that the Lord Jesus himself came as the devil's invincible adversary, able to bind him and to bring his power ultimately to a complete end.

And we pray, therefore, dear Father, that you will strengthen us to be willing to stand in the trenches, to go into battle for Christ, to pray, to trust, to teach the Bible, to pass on the message of the gospel.

[ 39 : 22 ] So please stir us up and strengthen us and give us courage and confidence, we pray. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.