EVERY THOUGHT OBEDIENT TO CHRIST

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Key Verse: 10:5

“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.”

Thank God for helping us to study chapters 8 and 9. Thank God for our Lord Jesus Christ, who though rich became poor giving his very own life for us so as to make us rich in life as children of God. Through him, we have been saved from sin, Satan, and eternal punishment and possess eternal life and the kingdom of God. The Son Jesus Christ is God’s indescribable gift. Treasuring this amazing gift of God, we may live a life of giving that our life may please God and make others happy and rich in Christ Jesus. May we keep the words of the principle of Gods’ blessing in our hearts, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” and live by this truth of God. May we know that giving is not wasting away but sowing for reaping and so truly saving, saving with multiplication. In our study of 2 Corinthians, we have four more chapters to go, chapters 10-14. In the first section from chapters 1-9, we saw Paul as a gracious shepherd. This second part, chapters 10-14, we will see him as a spiritual fighter, Christ’s soldier to wage war against false teachers. In today’s passage chapter 10, we can sense a warfare motif in which Paul is declaring war with his weapons ready to demolish strongholds that stand against God. In this study, may we clearly and deeply learn the nature of our war and the way to fight the war in this world.

**First, divine war versus that of the world (1-6).** Paul says in verse 1, “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, whom am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ when away!” In other translations (ESV, KJV, NASB) verse 1 starts with the phrases, “Now, I, Paul…” This expression well divides 2 Corinthians, section 1 and section 2, bringing another clear subject, and identifying himself unambiguously, saying, “I, Paul”, which is once written here in 2 Corinthians. In opening this war-declaring latter part of this letter, Paul appeals by the meekness and gentleness of Christ before showing his boldness and courage as a soldier of Christ. A good fighter or a soldier of Christ should have compassion as well as courage. The compassion is from the meekness and gentleness of Christ. We know that Jesus had authority and power to judge and punish all unrighteous sinners. However, Jesus was humble and gentle until he had to carry out his righteous judgment. We remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:29, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...” Matthew described Jesus’ humble and gentle heart in the following chapter 12, in verse 20, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory”, which is a quotation of Isaiah 42:3. Surely learning from Jesus, Paul was a mother-like shepherd as we studied in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, “we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us”, and a father-like shepherd depicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, exhorting, encouraging, charging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

And verse 1 continues, “I, Paul, whom am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ when away!” Here ‘timid’ is ‘humble’ in other translations, meaning wimpy and cowardly. Paul said in 10:10 says, “Some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.” It was probably because when Paul visited for the second time, he quietly bore all the accusations not fighting directly with those who rebelled against him. So, Paul used a sort of sarcastic expression, accepting their view of him, when he said, “I, Paul, who ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ when away!” And then he says in verse 2, “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 the world.” Though Paul was away, he did not convey his daring boldness or fearlessness, but his humbleness, begging them not to cause Paul’s truly bold confrontation toward unrepentant members.

Some said of Paul and his fellow workers that they lived by the standards of the world, which is “walking according to the flesh” in other versions. Such an expression is a type of disparagement, condemning Paul for being a charlatan and a fraud. Repeatedly in the early part of the epistle, in the first seven chapters, he defended himself against those attacks: in 1:12, “…Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and godly sincerity” and in 4:2, “…We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God” and in 7:2, “…We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one.” In writing this letter, Paul was giving them an opportunity to repent before his bold and fierce fighting.

Then Paul says in verse 3, “For though we live in the world…”, which is in other translations “though we walk in the flesh.” Here Paul does a little play on words in which he moves from the moral to the physical. He does not walk in the flesh morally as they have accused him of doing, but he does walk in the flesh physically. He denies the accusation that he is corrupt, but he agrees with the reality that he is human.

Interestingly, in verse 3, saying that though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does,” Paul brings war atmosphere to them. And verse 3 is “For those we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh” (in ESV, NKJV, NASB). It means though he is a man walking in the flesh, humanly speaking, he does not war according to the flesh.

After introducing war, in verse 4 Paul talks about weapons. He does not use human weapons. He says, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” Paul continues, “On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” Here we should think of divine weapons and the weapons of the world or of the flesh. Divine weapons are surely weapons from God, God’s own personal arsenal. Paul had said in 6:7, “in the word of truth and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.” We see that divine weapons are the weapons of truth and righteousness and of the gospel (Col 1:5). In Ephesians 6, Paul says, “Put on the full armor of God….Stand firm then, with the belt of truth, buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” Here also Paul said of truth, righteousness, and the gospel. And in Ephesians he added faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

When we think of the weapon of the gospel, we remember 1 Corinthians 1:18, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” And he said in verse 22-24, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Paul also said in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” And Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:15, “how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Our weapons are the gospel and the truth of God’s words.

Then what are the weapons of the world or the flesh? They are human wisdom, philosophy, or reason apart from God. They form atheistic views of all things. Such views influence our education system, social system, legislative body, jurisdiction, politics, economics, and international relations, etc. When we think of God’s creation, a family is truly God’s blessing as a core of his creation in the universe. However, such a godless view has distorted the concept of the family. Also, in God’s creation, male and female are beautiful two genders. When a baby boy is born, the gender is distinct, boy or girl. This is a scientific and biological fact. However, they do not accept the fact in their scientific mind. What a contradiction! The two-gender principle is the basis of God’s whole creation not only in human world, not also animal world and the world of plants. It is true in the electrical world as plus and minus. Also, the digital world exists on the basis of a binary system. As they denied God, their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:21). In NASB, “They became futile in their reasoning and their senseless heart was darkened.” In their futile reasoning and senseless hearts, they make laws and policies and school curriculums. Terrible practices are taught to our children. Although they claim to be wise, they become fools, and exchange the glory of the immortal God for that of mortal worthless humans and of unreasoning animals and exchange the truth of God for a lie. As they deny God and Christ, by default they are affected and ruled by demonic powers, the power of evil spirits, whether they recognize it. In such reasoning and wisdom, they construct strongholds in the minds and hearts of the people of the world. We are to know that those people who are ensconced and entrenched in these strongholds and fortresses are also imprisoned in them. The very place they think is their refuge is the place where they are prisoners, and their fortress becomes ultimately their tomb, for the mind of sinful man is death. They become a home of demons and a haunt of every evil spirit (Rev. 18:2), doomed for eternal destruction.

Nothing can demolish the strongholds and fortresses, but the power of divine weapons, the power of the gospel and the truth of God’s words. He said in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” Paul relied on the power of God’s word and God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living 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.” In ESV, “discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” God wants us to be equipped with the words of God. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

In verse 5, Paul continues, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets it up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Paul further explains the strongholds into arguments and every pretension that sets it up against the knowledge of God. “Arguments and every pretension that sets it up against the knowledge of God” is “arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (in ESV) and “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (in NASB). Here “arguments” or “speculations” is in Greek *logismos*. It means thoughts and ideas, opinions, reasonings, philosophies, theories, ideologies, religions. Then Paul further explains saying, “speculations and…”, probably a further explanation of the same thing, a better way to translate it, “and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” That is what a speculation is. He defines it right there. It is every concept, every opinion, every reason, every philosophy, every theory, every ideology, every thought that is against God. That’s a fortress, very strong and powerful, every one of them, which the pride of man erects like a fortified tower and in which he entrenches himself. Yet Paul said, “We demolish them…We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Truly great! It is as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:25, “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”

Paul was the one who with all his human wisdom and knowledge stood against God, not knowing what he was doing, to get rid of all those who belonged to Christ, the Nazarene sect known as the Way. However, when he met Christ, the stronghold in him was completely destroyed. He became a servant of Christ with absolute allegiance and obedience to the Lord Christ Jesus. He described his mission in Romans 1:5, “Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” And Paul described Christ’s life this way in Colossians 2:6-7, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” In such a Christian’s life, obedience is formed. And he continues to say in verse 8-10, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fulness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” With the fulness of Deity dwelling in him and as the head over every power and authority, Christ is worthy to be obeyed, worthy of every thought to be taken captive of and obeyed. Isaiah saw a vision that in the last days, the Lord’s temple would be established as chief among the mountains and raised above the hills (2:3) and Micah saw the same vision (4:1). Certainly, this vision is related to Christ. Again, Christ is worthy of the obedience of every thought. According to Paul, every knee should bow at the name of Jesus that is above every name and every tongue should that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We are reminded of the great commission of the risen Christ, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:18-20)

Paul said, “we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” For this our own obedience is critical. So he said in verse 6, “And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.” In Christian life and ministry, each individual’s obedience to Christ and the obedience of the body of Christ matter to be prepared to take captive and make every thought obedient to Christ. We also know that the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace (Ro 8:6). We need victory in this mind and thought battle. Even Jesus learned obedience. The author of Hebrews described Jesus’ obedience this way in Hebrews 5:8-9, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” May we learn obedience to him, especially absolute obedience to one word of God and grow as men and women of obedience and be able to lead others to obedience to Christ.

**Second, gospel servants versus false apostles (7-18).** In verses 7-11, Paul defends himself as a true gospel servant disputing against false servants of Christ. He says in verse 7, “You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he.” In their own confidence, false apostles claimed that they belonged to Christ. But as far as belonging to Christ is concerned, he is willing to say of himself as “a man in Christ” in 12:2, and he said in Galatians 6:17, “Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” He also said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die in gain.” His relationship with Christ was matchless.

He says in verse 8, “For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.” With the authority of the Lord Jesus Paul built up the Corinthian believers to the point of saying in 1 Corinthians 4:15, “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

And then he says in verse 9, “I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters.” The letter that he wrote was so firm and so confrontational that it led them to repentance. Yet, he had no joy in their pain and in their fear. He had joy only in their repentance and gladness. Paul continues, “For some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.’ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.” Paul lived before God and he was consistent before anyone whether absent or present with the goal to please God and honour Christ.

In verses 12-17 Paul continues to defend himself by confining his boasting in God’s limit and boasting in the Lord. He says in verse 12, “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.” Comparing is a characteristic of false teachers who try to elevate themselves by stepping on the backs and necks of others. Paul’s goal and standard was Christ. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

And he says in verses 13-15, “We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others.” It is significant to work in God’s given boundary or a proper limit. He speaks only of what Christ has done through him in the sphere of his calling. But the false teachers who had come into the Corinthian church Paul had established according to God’s leading had been destroying the work of God there.

Paul continues in verses 15b-16b, “Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.” As for us, we can serve one sheep whom God sent wholeheartedly, we can expand our area of activity. He said in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” The chain of preaching will be Paul-Timothy-reliable men-others. Thank God that M. Sarah has Bible study with S. Ian and Ian with Kane and Kane with his wife Sara. May this kind of chain of Bible study may continue, and in this way our area of activity for the gospel work may expand.

In verses 16b-18, “For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory. But, ‘Let him 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.” God wants us to be gospel servants approved by God.

Thank God for teaching us that we wage war, but not as the world does. We have divine weapons of the gospel and the truth of God’s words, which demolish the strongholds of proud human minds that stand against God. Thank God for Paul’s confession, “We demolish arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every though to make it obedience to Christ.” It may be our confession, as we engage in this warfare in our time.