

2,19,26 2 Cor. 10:1-6, Learning How to Live in Christ

Paul's going to talk about "the weapons of our warfare", and the only way these kinds of instructions we see in the Bible can help us is if they become ongoing personal experiences in life. The scriptures aren't just meant to be understood, categorized and diagramed; they are meant to bring us increasingly deeper into the experience of spiritual life in Christ by the transference of the life and mind of Christ into our inner man; not just modifying what we *do*, but reshaping the core of who we are.

We often focus on the outside of the cup, on our behavior, actions, and accomplishments; but God always works first on the inside of the cup. He knows that if He can change who we are, the outward will take care of itself. In one sense, that's the whole difference between Law and Grace – Law appeals to the flesh; Grace supplies life to the spirit. People who *become* something by nature, never need to be subjected to *any* system of rules and laws.

The world is filled with religions, some of which are called "Christian"; but Christ never came to start a religion of any kind; he came to give birth to a new species of humanity who would act in righteousness; not because of external commands, but because of the implantation and development of a new nature within them.

The difference between the outside and the inside, between religion and life, may be the most important thing believers in this final generation have to understand, because Christianity has become an outward system with behavioral recommendations rather than the natural inward formation of spiritual life.

Here's one explanation I found of this difference that will help clarify some of what we'll be talking about;

Since Paul's day so very much of Christian activity has been the furthering of a movement, and the furthering of the interests of an institution. It is *not* meant to be a movement in the Earth and to get followers, adherents, and members. It is not an institution. The church has no existence in the thought of God apart from the revelation of, and expression of, Christ, and it is judged according to the measure in which Christ the Son of God's love is in evidence

by its existence. It is not a denomination, and it is not a "non-denomination," it is not an "inter-denomination." It is not a thing called "Christianity." If Christ alone had remained central and preeminent, all these horrible disintegrating jealousies would never have had a chance. All the wretched mess that exists in the organization of Christianity today would never have come about. It is because something specific in itself, a movement, a work to be done, a social gathering, a Sunday morning service, has taken the place of Christ. People have gone out to promote that, to project that, to establish that. The existence of all that represents the absence of an adequate inward revelation of Christ. We are seeing some *thing*, that claims His Name, but we are not seeing Him Who is our life.

Watchman Nee added this based on Matt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

"Pure in heart" means a having as one's single objective the glory and the will of God. Such a man seeks nothing but what *God* may gain. God is the finality as well as the pursuit. Since he looks for only one thing, he therefore only sees one thing: he seeks God, and hence he sees God.

I'll give one final illustration from Sparks on this and then we'll look at Paul's instruction on our weapons;

Our natural mind is a great obstacle in the race which we are running, cropping up all the time with its complexes, its arguments, its interests and its methods. When the Corinthians were brought into the Church they left behind many of their obvious sins, but they carried over into their new realm the old, natural ways of thinking and reasoning which belonged to the world and not to the Spirit of God. But the apostle told them: "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), urging them to allow the Cross to be planted in between the natural mind and the spiritual. We shall only come to the fullness of Christ as we leave behind the mind of the natural man and move more and more in the progress of the mind of Christ. On everything; every judgment, every conclusion, every analysis, every appraisal; we must ask the Lord: "Is that Your mind, Lord, or is it mine?" We may sometimes feel that we

have the strongest ground for taking up a certain attitude or coming to a certain conclusion; we may feel that we have all the Biblical and circumstantial evidence we need, and so are convinced; and yet we may be wrong.

The man who wrote the letter to the Corinthians knew from bitter experience that this was the case. In Acts 26:9 we read this about Paul; "I genuinely thought... that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." There was no man who had stronger convictions as to the rightness, the correctness of his course than Saul of Tarsus. The great revolution which took place in him when he came to Christ was that he had to say: "I have been all wrong in my fundamental way of thinking." After that confession he made good headway in the race because he was always ready to subject his thinking to the jurisdiction of his crucified Lord. This is the way of spiritual progress. We shall not get very far while we hold to our own opinions and our own conclusions, even though we may have the support of others; we have to learn to conquer our natural mind by submission to the mind of Christ. This is most important if we are concerned about spiritual progress. Spiritual progress is the increase of Christ – there is no other.

These men I just read from put all their stress on the Person of Christ, not on something we have done to promote Him. The focus is Life, not function or outward progress.

Even in the first few verses of chapter 10 (our study tonight) Paul begins by explaining who he is, not just by what he wants the Corinthians to do.

(2 Cor. 10:1-6) Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present, I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of

God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Before he introduces the principles of spiritual warfare, he first gives them a glimpse of what he has become in his heart – a glimpse of the Christ-life within him; “meekness”, “gentleness”, “lowly” all which motivated his appeal to them through pleading and warning. Jesus described Himself as “meek and lowly of heart” and He wept over Jerusalem. Neither Christ nor Paul needed to be told that they should be this way or do these things; they did them because that’s who they were as men; it was organic and natural. And that is exactly what the Spirit of Christ within each of us is working toward – the weakening and eventual removal of the flesh and the full formation of the nature of Christ within us. That’s not religion in *any* form.

Now, on the exegetical side of things – Paul is continuing his defense of his apostleship as a counter to those who have rejected him. He does *not* walk according to the flesh; he is no longer that man. And he is the same person whether he is with them face-to-face, or communicating to them by letters. His boldness, or his withholding of boldness, is done in the best interest of the Corinthians. He’s not hypocritical; he is acting in love because his love for them is real and personal, it’s not generated by religious obligation.

And regarding the need for the Corinthians to understand spiritual battles and how to overcome them, Paul has to make sure they realize that the weapons we have are completely unrelated to the natural man; “. . . the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God. . .” The word “carnal” can be translated “of the flesh”; in other words, it’s talking about all that man, in himself, is capable of. As a lexicon puts it, “. . . that which is carnal is governed by mere human nature, not by the Spirit of God.”

We know that the primary means of attack the enemy uses is the same one he’s been using since the Garden – manipulation and deception. To be able to combat deception requires spiritual discernment on the one hand, but it also requires knowing that we are completely incapable in ourselves of having the discernment needed to see the truth about what the enemy is doing. And that is where things

get difficult. We have to first learn the full extent of our inability to function, let alone conquer, in the spiritual world.

We can intellectually believe that these things are true; that only the Spirit of God can deal effectively with what we are up against; that our weapons are only effective when they are “mighty through God”. We can believe all of that and still remain vulnerable to deception or moral defeat. It’s not enough to know the doctrine or principles involved, we have to know the magnitude of our inability, and the willingness of God to supply us with what we need to make the weapons we have effective. How does God get us there? What does He do to move these truths from our intellect to the core of our being?

Here's one explanation I found that I think can help answer that;

Mental activity and emotional appeal are exactly that which the New Testament calls the natural man, who, as a ‘soul-based’ man, is incapable of accepting what comes from the Spirit of God. Nearly all so-called revivals have happened on this basis. They were mighty movements for the shaking of emotions: mighty persuasions and argumentations were used to influence the understanding and will. What was the result? The natural man has been maneuvered into the religion of Christianity and been called a Christian. We cannot, however, recognize the thoughts of God in this and it has nothing to do with being born again. It may be that ‘rebirths’ *have* occurred in the revivals, but there is a difference between, let us say, a psychological rebirth and a rebirth in the Spirit. The one might temporarily carry all the characteristic features of a real rebirth. And yet all of that does not necessarily have anything to do with the Spirit, and in innumerable cases it has had *nothing* to do with the Spirit. It is a work of man.

Christianity has become a system of human interpretation of the thoughts of God.

Spiritual death hovers over it. It is no living testimony for God. God has given us a burden in our hearts concerning His thoughts. We do not speak to criticize. We speak because we have to....

People who stand for the rights of God will always be considered as enemies by those who reject the thoughts of God.... Wherever a religious system has come to reign, it will always be held against them that it is *they* who bring the people of God into confusion. This is what makes the ministry so difficult. This is what makes the ministry so costly. Israel was so deceived that it thought it was doing right in its idolatry. This is the highest level of deception, not seeing that everything one does, including that which is sincerely intended, can actually serve the devil. The prophet's disagreement is not in the first place with Israel. His battle is with the whole spiritual system into which Israel is entangled. But the prophet is ready to encounter this. He is misunderstood, he is slandered and seen as an enemy; he is marked as the one who troubles Israel. But he has a vision. He does not serve himself. He knows that his standpoint leaves no room for personal ambition. But he has seen God. He is connected to God. And in the special standing which he has with God, the difference between the godly and the human has been revealed to him. With this vision he has become prepared to carry the cost that the service of God demands.

What this writer is addressing is not only true in what's called "Christianity"; it also applies to the daily battles we personally face with psychological and spiritual attacks. If we are depending on our sincerity and our intellectual ability to discern and defeat those attacks, we will fail.

But we *won't* stop depending on ourselves until we know beyond any doubt that our only hope in this realm is to reject all that is carnal or natural and learn how to depend only on the Lord. It sounds simple, but appropriating spiritual weapons for a spiritual war is almost never our first response to the enemy's temptations. We usually try everything else we can think of first.

So, again, since the Lord knows that we will not make His provisions our first line of defense until we fully realize our own helplessness in effectively fighting in an invisible world. There are things He has to do to help us gain that understanding.

We know from passages like Rom. 5 and James 1 that trials and pressure can build character, but there is something else that these things accomplish in us directly

related to having a personal and full revelation of our inability when it comes to spiritual warfare. And without that revelation, most of what we try to do will not accomplish anything.

And that “something else”, which comes by suffering and revelation, is this.

Think this through with me. For 33 years, Jesus, as the perfect Son of Man, lived in complete dependence on His Father for every word He spoke, every action He took, every meal He would eat. For everything. He lived in perfect dependence for all that life is. We are to be conformed to His image; to live as He lived, but with us, there’s something in the way. Jesus had no carnality to discard; He was absolutely pure in His faith in His Father. He knew how life was meant to work for a Man. But we have the flesh blocking, grieving and quenching the life of the Spirit within us. And the only way that flesh can be overcome is by seeing it for what it is, which can’t happen until reality hits us – until we are consistently facing situations that are impossible to deal with if all we have is our own human resources to draw from. We have to be pushed beyond all our ability so that this moves beyond the realm of theology and principles and becomes reality to us.

Becoming like Christ, living like Christ, is what this life is all about. And this is the way God is going to get us there.

I’m going to draw from something I read by Sparks that was extremely personal to him – and no doubt to many others who have walked this path;

We are on common ground when we say that into which we have been brought by the Lord is no easy way. It's a difficult way, fraught with much confusion and a great deal of suffering, not peculiar to ourselves, but to a great number of the Lord's people on this earth. That we understand, we are talking a common language when we say that. But what does it mean? Really, what does it mean? Why is it like this?

We are brought right up against reality when we come into our suffering and adversity and trial. We are right up against reality. That is, all that we have been taught, all that we have received by teaching and reading, and think that we have and know, is brought to the point where we have to ask; does it

really work? Is it real, or is it, after all, just teaching, just theory? Is it real? In what part of our being is it; is it just in our minds, has it only reached our minds or our emotions? Or is it deep down there at the very center of our being, a part of our constitution, so that now, for us, it's a matter of life or death?

To anyone who is really meaning business with the Lord, it becomes a very serious matter as to whether all we've learned works or not. If it doesn't, then it's not as if we can simply set it aside and try something else in its place; it means great disappointment. The very foundation of our life is shaken. If what we've been taught should fail, it becomes something of an anguish. It goes to the heart and carries with it nothing less than either fulfilment in life, or disappointment in life. You realize that, when you're really up against it.

So, these kinds of experiences, which make no sense and make us wonder if *anything* is real any more, are experiences we must go through before we will give up on ourselves. The Lord is breaking down our self-dependence through despair in order to (quote) “. . . work in us to will and to do of *His* good pleasure”; to replace our inability with His ability as we learn to deny ourselves and give all we have and all we are to Him. In other words, it becomes, not in theory, but in reality, personally, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Verses like that become completely new in the light of the reality we are facing. We have to learn to set our own judgments and ideas aside so that we come to a place where we have no self-expectation, no natural ability to cope with this situation in front of us.

God is the only One Who knows what it will take to get us there. We may think we totally understand this and are doing all we can to take our self-sufficiency out of the equation, but until the Lord knows that this is our life, not just something we are doing our best to accomplish, what's actually happening, ironically, is that we still using *our* strength and determination to avoid using our strength and determination. That's not us '*being*' dependent on the Lord; it's us 'trying really hard' to be dependent on Him. When we truly understand, it won't be 'trying' or 'struggling' to be something; it will be natural and restful.

As one author put it;

Just as the human frame is not constituted for life outside of this planet, and has to have artificial provision to live out there, so we are not naturally constituted to survive in the spiritual world. We've got to have another constitution given to us, and I think, mentally we know that. We are brought again and again to a place where it's impossible for us to interpret the Lord, to explain Him, to understand what the Lord is really doing. We are out of our depth altogether in this matter. And not only mentally, but in powers of endurance; we are taken beyond our power of endurance, taken to the end of all natural endurance.

We are to become some kind of humanity, some kind of creation which we are not by our natural birth. And yet all the time that natural, born of the flesh life is always trying to worm its way into our thoughts and actions. The most difficult thing for us to learn is to not lean unto own understanding. If we do, we are finished. We are bashing our head against a stone wall when we try with our own natural abilities to understand the ways of God, or to do battle with our enemy.

Learning to trust the Lord and not to trust Man, especially ourselves, cannot be done through teaching alone. We have to be brought into situations in which nothing can be done about it. Where, humanly speaking, there's no hope at all. *Then* we will turn to the Lord and begin to live *in reality* that which before, we only knew *in theory*.

That's kind of the bottom-line of what's happened to Christianity over the years – it's gone from being the Life of Jesus expressed through our mortal flesh to everyone doing their best to be like Christ instead of letting the only One Who can be like Christ; be Himself in us.

So, the next time your world falls apart, no matter what the voices in your head tell you, God is moving you from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity. He's allowing you to learn how Jesus walked with His Father in the days of His humanity with the "not my will, but thy will" mindset of a servant of God. The Lord is bringing about

the perishing of the outer man and renewing of the inner man. We are experiencing the simultaneous inworking of crucifixion and resurrection. A process that Christianity has almost no understanding of apart from it being an historical event that secured our redemption. The heart of the gospel has been removed and replaced by religion. The Cross and Resurrection of Christ is not only an event; it's also the governing principle of the training and maturing of the sons of God.

If, when we are born again, we become a completely new species, a new type of humanity, then why do we think that the way to live this new life is to take all of the resources we've had since our first birth (our mind, emotion, intellect and senses) and apply them to what we read in the Bible and assume that that will result in the Christian life God intended for us? That's just the natural man attempting to live the spiritual life.

The reason I needed to go into all that is because without that understanding and experience, our attempt to use the "weapons of our warfare" will be as ineffective as we are. There has to be a firm position of faith in the Lord alone each time we pick up a spiritual weapon, because the effectiveness of any of them comes only from the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The weapons of our warfare cannot be "carnal", they can't be "natural"; they can't be "of Man" in any way, because we aren't fighting against flesh and blood, but against spiritual enemies which only the blood of Christ can destroy.

I'm sure you remember that whenever Satan attacked our Lord, no matter what the temptation or attempted deception he tried to use, Christ always had only one response. He never appealed to His own mind, power, wisdom, or strength. He simply quoted whatever passage the Father placed on His heart. The one thing Satan is powerless to defeat is a Man who is both trusting and using the sword of the Spirit against him.

This is why we are instructed to "lean not unto our own understanding, but to acknowledge Him in *all* our ways. . . "

The enemy's target is our mind. Our weapons are all related to either defense or offense involving attacks on our thinking, our view of things around and within us. As the author of a book called "As Silver Refined" put it;

Satan knows if he can capture your mind, he can capture your body, your actions. Isn't this the purpose of brainwashing prisoners? Brainwash them, and you can do with them as you please; they will follow you over a cliff if that is what you choose.

With that in mind, think of the implications of each of the weapons Paul lists in Eph. 6;

- The waist girded with truth
- Breastplate of righteousness
- The gospel of peace
- The shield of faith
- Helmet of salvation
- Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God

All of the weapons we have are only operational through prayer because, just as we've seen already, all spiritual power and victory come only from the indwelling Spirit; there is nothing in us that stands a chance against the wiles of the devil.

(Eph. 6:18) Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance . . .

There are seven weapons, including prayer, that Paul cites. The first and last (prior to the covering of prayer) address the right use of scripture – "girded with truth" and "the sword of the Spirit", just as Jesus demonstrated in His time of temptation by Satan in the wilderness.

I know this is probably obvious, but we can't use the scriptures in accurate application to the suggestions of the enemy if our knowledge of the Bible is limited to milk and inspirational devotionals. The Spirit will give us what we need when we need it, but He must have something to work with. He can't pull verses from our

memory and use them to crush Satan under our feet if there are little to no verses *in* our memory.

This doesn't mean I'm advocating for Bible memorization. There's nothing wrong with that, I'm sure it's helped a lot of people. But the most important thing isn't being able to just cite a verse, it's being familiar with the Bible to the extent that we have as full an understanding as possible of the meaning and implications of its contents.

Weirsbe makes a good point on this;

A successful weapon, or tool, is that which is necessary to accomplish a task. It's a shovel if you're going to dig a hole. It's a pen if you're going to write a letter, but when it's used in a military sense, as it is only two other times in the New Testament, it means weapons or armor that are necessary to defeat one in battle.

We have to understand the meaning or "use" of a verse before we can correctly apply it – it won't help to just have memorized the words on the page.

And you'll notice in our passage that "fortresses" or "strongholds" are deeply established perceptions which are false, but which are so ingrained that they drive our thoughts, opinions, judgements and actions.

Just one example of what I'd call a large-scale stronghold is mentioned by Adam Clarke;

The doctrines of the reformation, mighty through God, pulled down or demolished and brought into captivity, the whole papal system; and instead of obedience to the pope, the pretended vicar of God upon the earth, obedience to Christ, as the sole almighty Head of the Church, was established. The Lord God Omnipotent reigns!

Any strongholds *we* may have will probably not be as far reaching as Catholicism (unless we're a catholic), but whatever pulls us away from the Truth has to be confronted and destroyed.

Paul gives a perfect definition of this in vs. 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.”

Every argument that stands against the truth of God; every thought that is false is to be “taken captive” (literally, “be recognized and placed in its proper place of isolation”) and then thrown aside – demolished. As Paul put it in Eph. 5:10-11; “. . . find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather *expose* them.”

“Exposing” is bringing something into the light of God’s Word where it is seen for what it is – the lies of the enemy attempting to saturate our mind with deception.

(Gen. 3:4-5) You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

(2 Cor. 11:3, 12-15) I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.

You can see in all this that if we *know* the Truth, and if we *believe* the Truth, we will be able to withstand the attacks of the enemy – the sword of the Spirit will destroy his works.

Author Rick Renner gave a great summary approach to the fortresses that can form in our minds;

When a person has a stronghold in his mind or emotions, he has thick, invisible walls around him that act like both a fortress and a prison in his life. Like the walls of a fortress, these lies insulate him from people who may try

to break in to help him see the truth. Although others may want to help this person, they often find it impossible to break through the invisible barriers that surround his mind and emotions.

As a result, the person under mental and emotional assault is held captive like a prisoner to those lies. He sits behind mental and emotional bars, viewing life through the illusion of bondage that Satan has put into his mind. He looks at others, sadly wishing he could be free like them, not realizing that he has already been set free by the blood of Jesus Christ. The lies that operate in his mind keep him bound in an inner "prison" that he can't seem to break out of by himself.

No, not by himself. It's sometimes necessary that those in the body of Christ who can discern what is happening provide him with the 'weapons' he's neglecting so he can see more clearly what he needs to do to counter the opposition coming against him.

This presupposes he's willing to listen, and also that those who care about him are willing to take the relational risks needed to bring the truth to him.

And these comments by Watchman Nee are crucial in any discussion of effectual spiritual warfare;

Let us not forget that this spiritual armor is given to the church and not only to the individuals. It often requires the church to deal with the enemy. What you as an individual cannot see and safeguard, other members may see and guard against. Some members of the body are given faith in large proportion which can serve as a shield for your protection. Others have the word of God in a special measure, and this can stand as the sword of the Holy Spirit.

When one or several of them wield the sword—that is, when he or they use the word of God—this serves to help you. We must realize that there are circumstances when spiritual warfare is a joint battle.

I will close with these comments by Sparks on John 3:30; "He must increase, but I must decrease."

What is spiritual growth? What is spiritual maturity? What is it to go on in the Lord? I fear we have got mixed ideas about this. The hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is this: that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more. The mature soul is one who is small in his or her own eyes, but in whose eyes the Lord Jesus is great. That is growth. We may know a very great deal, have a wonderful grasp of doctrine, of teaching, of truth, even of the Scriptures, and yet be spiritually very small, very immature. Real spiritual growth is just this: I decrease, He increases. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more. You can test spiritual growth by that.