



Sermon – October 7, 2018
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

2 Corinthians 10:3 - 6

Well as you grab your seat, let's grab your Bibles. We're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 this morning. 2 Corinthians 10. And since Chris is not here, I'm going to do something that he would not normally do as an Alabama football fan. How about those Aggies last night? That was incredible and it's so good to be with you this morning. I love this church. This church is home to me. When I was here in the early 2000's, this is the church where God called me to ministry. It's the place where I met my wife. It's the place that hired me in my first role in ministry. This church's impact on my life is written in my ministry DNA. And I know that's not just true for me. I know that's true for dozens of people around the country and even across the globe who are seeking to make the name of Christ known. And I'm so grateful for the way that you invest in students like us with that long term investment so that we can reap gospel harvest later on.

As we turn our attention to 2 Corinthians 10, let me tell you a little bit about the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. I serve there as Executive Vice President and for the Southern Baptist Convention, we're the ethics and public policy arm. And what we do is we're a voice for Southern Baptists in the public square. Representing Southern Baptist views on cultural and ethical and political issues. And so my team in Washington D.C. has a nice easy job these days, right. No controversy there. But then we also are a voice to Southern Baptists and other Christians equipping you on how to think through what the Gospel means for everyday life. And that's exactly what we're going to do this morning when we spend our time in 2 Corinthians 10. If you'll follow along with me beginning in verse 3. Let's hear what the Apostle Paul has to say to us.

³For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but a divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

Let's pray together.

Father in this time I pray that Your Spirit would come down and meet each one of us. That the distractions of the world would fade away and that through the preaching of Your word, You would make us more like Jesus in Whose name we pray. Amen.

I know as many of you growing up here in Aggieland are coming through school, you know the name James Earl Rudder. He was president at Texas A&M in the 1960's. Responsible for integrating the campus, for bringing non-Corps of Cadet students on campus, and for some of you, he's the reason that you're married right now. Because he integrated it with gender and allowed women to come onto the campus as well. He had tremendous impact on Texas A&M University. But that was about two decades after he had already made a major difference in American history. Because Earl Rudder was there in a significant way on D-Day in 1944. You see there was a very important assignment that was given on D-Day. There was a location right between Omaha Beach and Utah Beach called Pointe du Hoc. Pointe du Hoc was a high cliff out on a point that would allow the German military to have free range to shoot down the beaches in either direction and to ward off any enemies that were coming. And Earl Rudder and his team of rangers were given the assignment to take Pointe du Hoc. Now this place was, once you entered onto the beach, it was a 100-foot sheer cliff in order to get to the top. And up there, there were many Germans that were prepared to defend those cliffs. And they had to shoot, they had to shoot rope ladders up to the top of them and then scale those ladders after being soaking wet coming off of the water trying to protect themselves from the rain of bullets that were firing down. And over time as his men, his crew of 225 advanced, by the end of that skirmish, only 90 of them could continue in the battle. They made a tremendous sacrifice that day, but they knew the stakes were high. And the stakes were high because that stronghold was a key to the rest of the battle. If they could tear down that stronghold, then they can make a way for the rest of the D-Day invasion to have success.

And as many Biblical scholars have pointed out, when we look at what unfolds in the New Testament, the cross of Jesus Christ is just like that D-Day. It is the decisive victory that is won in the spiritual battle that we have with Satan and the world and sin. It is the decisive victory blow that He makes there. But just like after D-Day, World War 2 was not over in the European theatre. We don't yet see all things under Christ's feet, do we? We still wrestle with sin in their hearts. We still see brokenness in the world. We are longing for that victory day when Christ will return. And in that meantime, Paul is giving us a word this morning of what it looks like to walk in the warrior way; to take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. And he's writing this letter to the church at Corinth. Corinth was a center of commerce in that area. And it was positioned in a hilltop. And up upon the hilltop there were numerous temples including the temple to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. And it was a major thoroughfare there in that vicinity of the world. Then as Paul writes to them, he has a word for us this morning. That if we want to understand what it looks like to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, he's going to lay out three ways that we need to follow God in spiritual warfare in the battle for our mind.

Now notice the first one here in verse 3. He says,

³Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh,

Paul calls us first to fight the right battle. He speaks there of walking in the flesh. What does that mean? The Bible gives a multi-faceted answer to what it means to walk in the flesh. So we know

from back in Genesis 1:27 that God made every person in His image. And so part of what it means to walk in the flesh is to reflect the image of God. But don't you remember when Jesus is preparing to go to the cross and He asks His disciples to pray for Him and they fall asleep and He rebukes them? He says to them in Matthew 26:41, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Because the Bible points out that there are limitations of the body. That walking in the flesh means we are taking on limitations on how we live.

But the third aspect of what it means to walk in the flesh is the one that's most crucial for this morning. Because the Bible presents the picture of walking in the flesh as walking with a limp. Walking reflecting the fact that we are fallen humanity that faces temptations and fleshly desires. So elsewhere Paul, in Galatians 5:17 says, the desires of the flesh are against the spirit.

Several years ago I led a study abroad trip, when I was teaching in seminary, to the city of Corinth. And as we walked around the marketplace there at the center of the city, our guide was telling us about the temple worship that would happen for the goddess Aphrodite. There would be temple prostitution that went on in the city and the way that these women of the night would allure those to come back up the hillside with them in order to attract them to worship Aphrodite in this way. Is they would walk into the city and on the sandals of their feet, imprinted on the bottom of the soles, was the Greek word for follow me. And every step they would take in that sandy ground would leave that imprint alluring others to follow them in temptation towards this sinful act. That's the picture that Paul is speaking of here. Of the challenge of walking in the flesh. There's this constant allure that we have towards sin. And we know that's not just true of us. That was true of Jesus. He faced that same temptation and yet without sin. And that's why Paul calls us, in Philippians 1:27, to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. He says, "We need to walk in the flesh." But he establishes a contrast in verse 3. Do you see it? He says, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh."

So what does it mean to wage war according to the flesh. My wife and I are raising four boys at home. I have one of them here with me this morning. And in our house there's a lot of rough housing. There's a lot of aggravating. And they work out their disagreements with each other aggressively. And so I was in another room, coming to break up a fight not long ago. And before I could get there, I walk in and this is what I overhear. I hear one of them asking the other to stop. And the eight-year-old says to the other one, "I want to stop sinning, but sin is in my heart." And he says, "I can't promise you that I will never sin again." And then the other one said to him, "Will you promise me that at least you will try?" And he said, "Yeah, I'll try." And I think that lasted about five minutes before the next altercation occurs. When he says that we do not war according to the flesh, he's saying we don't war in that way. Because you and I know that an eight-year-old, even with the best intentions of the world, doesn't have the sufficient willpower and discipline to go the rest of his life without sin. To go through the rest of his life without warring according to the flesh. The way that you war according to the flesh is through willpower. Is through self-restraint. It's through moralism. But then it's also through relativism that when you fail, you diminish the significance of that because, "Hey, everybody makes mistakes." He's saying that's not the way we as Christians are called to fight. We need instead, to fight the right battle in just the way Jesus did in the second temptation. You remember that in Matthew, chapter 4? Satan comes to Him and he tells Him, he takes Him to the top of the temple. He says, "Throw Yourself down because I know that a band of angels will come and rescue You." He tempts Jesus

towards self-preservation. And he appeals to that willpower. But Jesus rejects it. Paul says, “If you want to find lasting victory in the Christian life, you can’t fight for Christian victory in unChristian ways. You know, so often when you hear people talking about sin, you hear them using the language, I’m struggling with this or I’m struggling with that. And in one sense it’s a very Biblical idea. The Bible is repeatedly calling us to wage war against sin in our life. But you know what I found? Far more often that language, I’m struggling with this or I’m struggling with that, is just an attempt to assuage a guilty conscience. I know this is wrong to do and I probably should stop, but I’m not quite yet ready to take this serious enough to actually put it to death. They tell me that the experts say that October 30th is the skinniest day of the year. It’s the day before Halloween and then Halloween starts all of the holiday eating and I remember growing up coming to A&M/Longhorn football games and we would eat massive turkey dinner on Thanksgiving day and then head to the game. And you know what I’m talking about when I say this. You eat so much on a holiday somebody will push back from the table and say something like this. I ate so much; I’m never going to eat anything again. And then what happens? Four hours later, they’re back in there grazing, they’re going for another roll or some extra dressing or some Blue Bell ice cream. Why is that? It’s because for a short time, they had a satisfied appetite. And when your appetite is satisfied, it doesn’t matter how much or how good the food is, you can’t imagine eating any more.

But soon after that appetite returns and Paul is giving us the same warning. That the appetite, the desire, the temptation for sin is relentless. And unless you stand on guard against it by fighting the Lord’s battles in the Lord’s way, you will not be able to stand. And that means for those of you this morning who are wrestling or struggling with things like pornography that nobody else knows about, you’ve mastered the way to hide it, the Lord sees it and He wants to set you free. And this morning He is calling each one of us to surrender those areas of our heart that are in rebellion to Him so that He might make them more like Christ by the power of the Spirit. See what Paul was doing here is contrasting the worldly way vs. the warrior way. He says, “We don’t war according to the flesh.” But notice what he says beginning in verse 4. He gives us a second big idea here. He says,

⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but of divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

So the second big idea here is Paul was calling us to use the right weapons. He says, “Don’t war according to the flesh.” That’s the worldly way. Here is the warrior way. He says, “We do not use a warfare, the weapons of our warfare, not of the flesh.” So what are those weapons of the flesh? He lays it out elsewhere in Philippians, or Colossians 2:20 – 23. He goes through a list of things that the world will tell you to do. Do not handle. Do not taste. Do not touch. And he says this,

²³these things have the appearance of wisdom, but they are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

That’s why he’s warning you not to fight the Lord’s battle in a way other than the Lord’s way. It’s because those things will not create lasting victory in your life. When you try to fight for victory

using the weapons of your flesh, it's a little bit like overtime last night, isn't it. You're starting to move the ball, big third down, the only thing your coach probably told you to do was, "Don't take a sack." And what happens? You take a sack. Then you line up the kick. You at least want to get three points. It comes off your leg. It looks good. It's heading right down the middle. And what happens? It hits that crossbar and it bounces out. In your own strength, in your own way, you will always fall short of the consistent victory that God is calling you to. But what he is showing us here is that we are to resist the weapons of the flesh. The weapons of the flesh are fear and not faith. They are status and not Spirit. They are circumstances and not Christ. The problem with the weapons of our flesh is that they are more concerned with what it costs us, than what it cost Jesus to make a way for us. So he contrasts that. He says instead we need divine power. Divine power that only comes by the Spirit through the word of God and by prayer. Because we know that the Bible has promised us all that we need for life in Godliness.

So how do we take up the right weapons? Paul uses warfare imagery here in three stages. He's showing us three stages of the warrior way to fight sin in our life. And the first one is right there where he says, "We must destroy strongholds." Now I talked about Rudder's Rangers heading up those cliffs to take Pointe Du Hoc. When they finally made it to the top, they had studied through aerial photos what it would look like and where they should go in order to take out the enemy's best locations. But what they found at the top was totally different than what they expected. You know why? Just days before that, the Air Force had done major bombing over that area and done significant damage to Pointe Du Hoc and some of its major defenses. And as a result of that, it was as if the Air Force had gone before them to tear down the strongholds that might make a way for them to make it to the top and accomplish their mission. That's the picture of destroying strongholds that Paul is giving us here.

So what are these strongholds that he's speaking of? He talks about two right here in the text. Do you see it? He says the two strongholds that every one of us must battle against are persuasion and pride. Look back at the passage. The first stronghold he speaks about are arguments. These are appeals. They're persuasion. It's temptation and deception. One of the things that we must understand if we want to fight in the warrior way is the way that Satan works. From the very beginning in Genesis chapter 3, Satan's path of tempting us towards sin is to appeal to our appetites through compelling arguments. Do you remember what he said to Eve? He tempted her and said, "Has God really said this?" And then right before she takes a bite of that forbidden fruit, the text tells us that she noticed that it was desirable for food. It was a delight to the eyes. And it would make one wise. What did Satan do? The serpent appealed to her appetite by making persuasive arguments. And that's precisely what Paul is calling us to war against this morning. Now regardless of your politics, I think we can all agree that one of the hardest jobs in Washington under any presidential administration is the role of Press Secretary. So you know how a Press Secretary works? They come out to help others understand the reasons and the rationale behind decisions made by the president and the administration. So oftentimes what they're doing is coming behind decisions that have been already made and reframing those in a way to drive the message to the public. And oftentimes those press secretaries are going to get pressed and they're going to have to defend. They're going to have to justify. They're going to have to rationalize in order to make sense of a decision that had already been made. And so often in our lives, these arguments work in the same way. Our sinful flesh drives us toward ways that we desire to live that satisfy our appetites and often what we do is we construct arguments, rationales, and

justifications for why those things are OK in my unique circumstances. It's not alright for others, but it's OK for me. Paul says, "Those must be torn down." He says, persuasion is one of the strongholds, but the other one that he talks about here is pride. Do you see it back there in the text? He speaks of lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God. What Paul was pointing out to us this morning is that pride is central to rebellion. The pull towards rebellion is rooted in pride. That was true of Adam and Eve. That was true of the way that Satan tempted Jesus in his second temptation. And what we must recognize is that these lofty opinions reveal to us that temptation comes when we focus on our desires instead of God's. He says, "These lofty opinions are raised against the knowledge of God and they have the appearance of tremendous power in our lives." I talked about Rudder's Rangers making it to the top of Pointe Du Hoc. And the topography was different than they had expected because the strongholds had been torn down. But one of the other discoveries that they made is that many of the weapons that they found at the top of that cliff were not even real. The Germans had come through and taken telephone poles and painted them black to make them look like they had more power on that point than they actually did. Once the military got up close to see how dangerous the weapons that they thought they were battling against actually were, they discovered that it was a fake, that they had no actual power to deliver what they appeared to be able to do. Isn't that how the Bible speaks of the power of Satan in our lives? He has the appearance of power; the appearance of authority, the appearance of temptation and deception. And yet if we are following Christ, then He has neutralized every weapon that Satan has set to stand against us. But the only hope that we can stand against the weapons of Satan, is if we've surrendered our lives to Christ. Have you done that this morning? Do you know Him? Because that plays right in to the last part of this passage where we see a third big idea where Paul speaks here and he says,

take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

The third key to fighting in the warrior way that Paul shows us here is to take the right captives. So stage one of warfare is tearing down the stronghold, well once you do that and you invade the enemy's strongholds that you've just torn down, the next step in warfare is to take captives. And that's what Paul is speaking of here. Once you've infiltrated the strongholds, you take the captives. What are the captives he's calling us to take this morning, church? Our thoughts. And if we're being honest with ourselves, oftentimes we are not the ones taking our thoughts captive. Our thoughts are the ones taking us captive. Have you ever noticed that? You wake up in the morning and you don't know why you haven't even gotten out of bed yet and you're mad? You're replaying what happened yesterday or last week. You're already gripped by anxiety before the day starts. That anxiety comes into your mind. That fear cripples you. It's a fear about the unknown or fear about the future or fear about the way others will perceive you. Or maybe for you it's not anxiety. Maybe it's anger. And for some, it's the kind of anger that burns hot in rage. For others it's a kind of anger that burns cold with bitterness. Or may it's pity that gets your thoughts. Of feeling sorry for yourself. That life's not fair. That you haven't been dealt a fair hand. That your situation is complete, unique, that nobody understands. Nobody can sympathize with you. Or maybe the thoughts that take you captive are cynicism. You see so much hypocrisy in the world. You see the way that things have happened that have jaded you by your experiences. Paul is speaking to each one of us this morning and saying, "If you have been rescued by Christ, if the Spirit of God

indwells you, if you have been set free from the power and the penalty of sin, then you can take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

A couple weeks ago my wife and I were in Sam’s. We were shopping and that’s what we did on date night, as a matter of fact. I’m a little bit embarrassed to say that. We went to Sam’s on date night. That sounds even worse saying it than it probably does with you hearing it. But we’re there roaming around Sam’s and we’re in the clothing section and I look over and there’s a couple carrying a few items that they’re about to purchase. And I’m not paying any attention to them. My wife comes back to me after she had walked over in her area and she said, “Hey! You see that couple over there?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “I saw the woman stuffing stuff into her bag. I think they’re shoplifting.” And so I’ve seen all the movies. I know what to do on this, right. So we setup a tail strategy and I know, don’t get too close, don’t get too far, don’t make too much eye contact. We’re just kind of walking around the store following them. Well when we’re not paying attention, we see them start to head for the exit. And I hustle over to the nearest employee who has the big badge on his shirt that said, “Jason.” And I said, “Hey, those people that just walked out, they have stuff in their bag.” And he said, “Well what did they take?” Now you’d think if you’re going to take the risk of shoplifting, it might be electronics, maybe some jewelry, some valuables. You know what the only thing we actually saw them put in the bag was? A cheesecake. They shoplifted a cheesecake. Now I’m sure if you shoplift a cheesecake, you’re taking other things on top of that. But they took that and as soon as I said that, the other employee standing right next to him yells out, “Go get ‘em, Jason!” And it was like the defining moment of this staffer’s life. And he hustles out the door and you can see them walking to their car. I know he’s got a chance to head them off. And he’s gone for what feels like an eternity and we’re all waiting to come back to see what, what they tried to take and what he got back from them. Maybe they’re going to be in cuffs. He shows up empty-handed. And the other staffer says, “What happened?” And he says, “Well when I was walking out the door, I remembered our training. And our training says that if there’s someone shoplifting and they get out the door of Sam’s, of the store, that we’re not supposed to do anything. Because they might become physical in an altercation. It might put us in harm’s way or they might accuse us of lying to them and sue the store. And I didn’t want to lose my job over this.” And I was sitting there thinking, “Isn’t that your job?” And I was struck by the fact that in that moment he was more concerned about protecting himself than he was about protecting his store. And so often when we think about what it looks like to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, we are torn between that same pull of self-preservation and of doing what honors God. And the call this morning that Paul is giving us here is that we are to take those thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. Now how do we do that? Psalm 42 gives us a window that we should not just be listening to ourselves, but preaching to ourselves. That the only preaching you hear during the week is what you come here to find at Central on Sunday mornings, then you are missing a chance to reframe your thoughts to make them honoring to Christ. The psalmist says in Psalm 42,

⁵Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Hope in God,

He’s preaching to himself. Paul, in Colossians 3, verse 1, says, set your mind on things above, not on the things of this world. Those are the ways that we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. But Paul closes this section by giving us the third stage of the battle that we’re all called to when he says that after a military tears down the strongholds, they take the captives. Then once

they've taken the captives, they punish disobedience. They stamp out resistance and rebellion. And that is the call of the gospel on each one of our lives this morning. That by the power of the Spirit, we're to do what the theologian of old, John Owens, said. Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Have you ever gotten a text from somebody that says, "Hey, I have something to drop by your house? I'm going to be there in 10 minutes. And you internally start to freak out because you look around your living room or your kitchen and the whole place is a mess. And you can't host anybody right now with it looking like this. And so what do you do? You don't clean things up and put them away, you shove them in the closet. You close the door. You put them in the dishwasher real quickly. You put all those things behind closed doors rather than putting them in their proper place. That's often the temptation with sin in our thought lives. That we want to put it behind closed doors rather than putting it to death. We want to create the appearance to others as if we have our thought life and our attitudes and our actions under control rather than surrendering to Jesus. Until our obedience is complete. Now 40 years after Earl Rudder led the Rudder's Rangers up Pointe Du Hoc, Ronald Reagan appeared at that exact location and gave a famous speech about the Boys of Pointe Du Hoc. And I'm going to read a short section of this as we close. Reagan stood there at the top of that stronghold that had been torn down and he said this.

The men of Normandy had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all humanity, faith that a just God would grant them mercy on this beachhead or on the next. It was the deep knowledge -- and pray God we have not lost it -- that there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest. You were here to liberate, not to conquer, and so you and those others did not doubt your cause. And you were right not to doubt.

You all knew that some things are worth dying for.

As we close this morning, that is what 2 Corinthians 10 is telling us. That some things are worth dying for. That if we have followed Jesus by surrendering to Him in faith for salvation, then the call on our lives is to surrender our thoughts to the obedience of Christ.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Lord I know in a room like this there are so many, myself included, that wrestle with these thoughts, God. That so often we don't know how to get there, they're relentless in coming, and so often we are willing to just leave them there, to not wage war against them. I pray that You would set our hearts and our minds free to follow Christ. That you would equip us to take every thought captive to His obedience. And most of all, God, if there are people in this room that are under captivity to Satan and sin, I pray this morning that You would rip out hearts of stone. That You would replace them with hearts of flesh so that they too might walk in the warrior way that you've called us to. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.