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April 8, 2018

## 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-5

### 2 Corinthians Series

Let's pause for a moment and settle our hearts before the Lord.

[PRAYER] Lord, I pray that you would renew our spirits today. You know that each of us come with different needs. Some just need to be encouraged and I pray that today they would experience your grace in that way. Others need a prophetic message that will stir them up a little bit to get them moving in the right direction. I pray that you'd use your word in that way too. Some just need inspiration and hope to continue on to live a challenging life this week. So Lord, we know that your word is living and active and it meets us where we have needs. So as we open your word today, we ask that you would speak in a powerful way as we look more about your power and what it is for us personally. Lord, we're weak and needy and in great need of you. So we ask that you would teach us today. Open our hearts in new and powerful ways. In Jesus' name, amen.

We are in a study of the book of 2 Corinthians, going through it verse by verse. The theme throughout 2 Corinthians seems to be a theme about power, the power of God. As we come to 2 Corinthians 10, I want to talk about a very specific kind of power that God gives us and a specific kind of problem that we all face. I want to talk about the personal demons that we each have in our own lives, those inner struggles.

Let me define my terms quickly here because those of you who are theologians may have a challenge with those words 'personal demons.' Because demons are real, they are part of Satan's army to influence our world. Demons are real. I'm not using the word 'personal demons' in that sense of spirits. I'm using 'personal demons' as the inner struggles that we experience in our own lives. I'm going to try to illustrate that, help you understand that, but it's something we all experience in our lives because we're human, we're broken, we're challenged in our lives. So we all come to these inner struggles that need to be addressed deeply within our hearts.

So in preparation for what we're going to do, I want to actually look at the text that we're going to draw truths from in order to try to understand what God is saying from the text. We'll take many principles out of this passage. So please open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians 10. I'm going to read verses 1-5. Would you stand with me please as I read this passage of God's word.

2 Corinthians 10:1-5. Paul is writing – *By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away! 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 this world.* Christians think differently than non-Christians.

He's going to illustrate that. But he's saying there are some people who think we live by the standards of the world.

*Verse 3 – For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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.*

You may be seated.

Today I want to talk to you about spiritual warfare. Now some of you have been in the military, so you understand the illustration that I'm about to share. But if you were on a battleship and you had a job, maybe it was painting or maybe your job was to be a cook or to clean, that was your job that you would do regularly. However, when the alarm went off and "battle stations" was announced, everybody would go to their place where they had a different job. They would put on different gear maybe. They would take on a different task and they'd have a different mission. Battle stations. When the alarm goes off, they would start living differently in that moment.

I would wonder today if in the Christian community if we announced "battle stations" if there wouldn't be a lot of Christians looking around saying, "I don't know what to do. Where am I supposed to go? What should I put on? What is my task? How should I handle battle stations?"

But I want today to raise the awareness level of all of us that we are in a significant battle. All of us. We're in a war. And this war is a challenging one. I want to take the word 'war,' it's not my illustration, it's God's illustration that he shares right in the passage there. He uses in verse 4 the word *weapons* and here he's talking about waging war in verse 3. It's a significant war. It's a battle. It's a battle that we all face in our lives. It's a war. It's something going on inside of us when we deal with some of the thoughts that are contrary (or the Bible calls them in that passage *pretensions*) that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. When those things happen inside of our hearts, there's a battle going on inside of us. There's a war taking place on the inside that must be addressed. So God uses this picture of warfare to help us understand the challenge and what we should do.

Now I don't want you to think that this is only for people who are super spiritual, this is only for people who are engaged in some form of spiritual warfare that's external. This is something that all of us need because all of us are broken and sin affects all of us in ways that impact our hearts.

If you want to know if this is a message for you about spiritual warfare, you just have to look down here (not somebody else's belly), but if you look at yours and you have a belly button, that's your indication that this is a sermon for you. Here's why. That means your name isn't Adam or Eve. Adam and Eve didn't have belly buttons. They didn't come into our world the same way we came into the world. So likely, unless God made them that way so they'd look like everybody else, they didn't have belly buttons. But every one of us because of the sin of Adam and Eve something is transmitted through the whole process of child-rearing and birth and so on that we all receive or have this sin nature.

When Adam and Even sinned, it did three things. One: it separated them from God. So there's a separation from God that of course is achieved through salvation. We come to know God. Secondly it separated them from each other. And so they put clothes on because they wanted to hide their nakedness. So it separated them from each other. That's what sin does. It separates us from each other. And thirdly, it does something inside of us. It kind of corrupts some stuff inside and messes with us.

I want to talk about that today. I want to talk about the inner struggles that we all face, the personal demons that maybe challenge us in particular ways. They may be a lack of confidence for one reason or another. It may be a fear that we have. It may be negative thinking that we go back to our critical nature, that we're critical of other people. I don't know what it is for you, but there are things inside of us that [garbled] for us when things aren't going as well as we'd think and hope. So what we need to do is we need to be able to deal with those challenges and we need to be able to respond to them in the right kind of way. It's a spiritual battle.

Now the idea of war is something that God talks about in His word in this passage that Paul's using, but it's also used in other places. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, he talks about just the hardship we have in life. When we face the hardships in life we need to face them as a soldier with a mission and we're going to in the right direction.

Now I want you to understand today as I talk about Satan and his army of angels and we talk about the inner struggles, I want to differentiate between those two things. I want you to understand that inside of us we have struggles, but they are external things too. Sometimes it's because Satan and his angels, his demons are influencing in one way or another. But other times it's just because of hardships out there.

You can't blame it all on the devil. We live in a painful world. So when that happens, we need to have this attitude and we need to have this mentality that we are soldiers in the midst of that. Of course in Ephesians 6 we have the whole discussion of the full armor of God to protect us. Not only defensively against the attacks of the devil, but also offensively to know how to proceed.

Now today as we look at this whole idea of spiritual warfare, I want to talk about "what" this week and next week I want to talk about "how". This week we're going to talk about what it is, what it looks like, and the nature of the spiritual battle so we all know where we are in all of this. And we raise the awareness level of this wrestling that takes place. Next week we'll talk about how to fight it also from the same passage as we come and look at it as well.

You see, Satan and his angels have created a world system. We live in this world system, and as we live in this world system we are faced with temptations and other things to go along with the world. The world system involves things like a mentality among our culture, politics, economics, media, the news, education.

I want to suggest to young people, if you're in class you can't just assume that everything your teacher says is correct. Because your teacher may be affected greatly by the world system. And the world system is designed to set up *pretentions against the knowledge of God* (that's what the passage says), but to share things that will be anti-God. It's not just in classrooms that this takes

place, although it certainly does take place there. But it also takes place in the way the media portrays certain things about our world. The way politicians make decisions about how we're going to operate and what's good and what's bad, what's lawful and what's unlawful. There's a system behind all of that that Satan is influencing and controlling and we have a mission *not to be*, as Paul says it, *conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds*.

So every day you go out there like a soldier wondering where the enemy is. I'm not suggesting you be paranoid, but I am suggesting to be on guard. Because the influences are trying to get into your heart to cause you to believe things that are against God. So we must continually be renewing our minds in order to understand what God would have for us. I want to suggest that there are three attacks that Satan uses in our world today that we see from God's word. I want to you to understand the enemy because the enemy is out there trying to influence us.

If you're a Christian today, I want you to know the enemy cannot come inside of you. *Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*. He cannot come inside of you, although he can highly influence you if you're not careful and you can open yourself up to Satan in ways that can be damaging. You want to be careful about how you respond to Satan and his attacks. The world system and the way Satan operates are designed to destroy you and so you need to know what Satan does and what he's going to do. So I want to share with you three of the attacks that Satan uses on us. Just so we're aware a little more of the enemy.

The first one is this temptation. And you know what this is. When there's something out there that appeals to some desire you have in your heart that "I want that," "I feel injustice, so I want revenge." There are temptations that are put out there to corrupt us and to mess with us that hinder us on the inside. I would suggest there are three big temptations that we all need to have a plan for. In your life, you need to have a plan for these three things. Money, sex, and anger are the three big things that many people get in trouble with in their lives. One or more of these can be debilitating and rob you of the blessing that God wants you to have in your life.

So sexual immorality is a temptation. So in our world system pornography is very accessible to young people, to men, to women. You know that what happens when you are tempted and you give into that temptation then bad things happen. Pornography ruins a man's masculinity, his ability to lead, plagues him with guilt. It's damaging. You don't want to be involved in pornography. It's sexual temptations that's easily accessible and it's damaging to a person, how they are, it's damaging to a marriage relationship (if you're in one), but it just hinders your relationship with God. It hinders your ability to be the person that God has called you to be.

Another one is bitterness and if anger isn't managed. God made us as emotional people. But if anger isn't managed well and it turns into bitterness, then you start reacting to anger greater than the situation warrants and more often than the situation warrants. So you tend to go to anger more quickly as a solution. Bitterness is a problem and it ruins a person's heart and robs them of the beauty that God wants them to experience.

The third temptation is materialism. That's getting so involved in things. And it doesn't make any difference whether you're poor or wealthy, whether you have a lot of money or a little bit of

money. It doesn't make any difference if you're preoccupied with things, what you don't have and wish you had and so you can be rich and hoard things and poor and hoard things. Just being so preoccupied with materialism can be damaging and cause you to miss out on the spiritual blessings of being in our world today. So temptation is a primary way that Satan and his demons try to attack us on the outside. They appeal to desires, wishes, emotions on the inside that try to draw us out and get us into trouble.

A second of Satan's attacks is the accusations. That he wants us to feel unworthy. He's called the Accuser. He wants us to feel unloved, he wants us to feel unimportant. Of course if you've failed in your life (as we all have), but you view your failure as just terrible and tremendous and hard to recover from and "I don't know if I'll ever be the same," and now you hear or see the enemy accusing you that "you'll never be able to recover, you've fallen too far, your life will never be the same," that's a problem. That's the Accuser trying to do some damage inside of us, to rob us of the beauty of this life that God wants us to enjoy and experience.

A third of Satan's attacks is deception, lies. Many of us identify personal lies that have gotten us into trouble or gotten us off track. We need to correct those, of course, with God's truth. But there's also this closed-mindedness, you know this sense when someone says, "Don't confuse me with the truth. I've got my mind made up," it's this closed-mindedness that often keeps a person in a place where they can't experience the beauty that God wants us to have in our lives. And of course we're influenced. The deceptions of influence.

Young people, the friends that you choose are really important. Did you know that people choose friends based on something they want brought out of them. So if someone is funny, you might be attracted to them because you want to laugh. If someone listens to you, you like that because you want to share. So friends are like that. But if those friends are funny and listen, but they also are mischievous or sneaky or getting involved in things that they shouldn't be, then you're opening yourself up to this influence that can cause you to do things that are wrong. It's dangerous.

So when we talk about the enemy, Satan, we're talking about the influence and the temptation and the deception that exists by him in our world today and it's dangerous. We need to be ready to face that and deal with it. Because what happens then if we don't is things happen on the inside of us. And we start believing things, we have these inner struggles inside because of these attacks of Satan. The inner struggles that I want to focus in on today because that's what's focused in on in the passage, so those inner struggles develop in our lives that must be addressed.

It's interesting that when Jesus was on earth, He wanted the people to understand this idea that there's an enemy out there trying to destroy you. In John 10:10 he faces the Pharisees and he tries to explain to the Pharisees what's going on. He says to the Pharisees – "Let me give you the illustration of the shepherd," he says. "I'm the good shepherd, he says, and my sheep know my voice. And there's this relationship I have with them." That's what he's saying. He's talking about providing the sheep with what they need.

But he contrasts the sheep with the bad guy he calls the thief, representing Satan, the evil one. And he says it this way in John 10:10 he says – *The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* That's why this song *Old*

*Church Choir* is such a fun song to sing. “Nothin’ can steal my joy.” I’ve got Jesus Christ. He’s my shepherd. He’s the one working in my life. “Nothin’s gonna steal my joy.” But the devil’s goal is to steal our joy, steal our peace. It is his goal to destroy relationships. It is his goal to kill any good that could happen in our lives. That’s the devil’s goal is to steal, to kill, and to destroy.

But Jesus says He has come to give us life. And His life that He gives us is a full life. If you look at your own inner demons, those inner dialogues, those inner struggles that you face in your own life, then you know they rob you of some of the fullness of life.

The passage is going to refer to them as strongholds. These are like outposts that are caused because of Satan’s activity. They are caused inside of our hearts. And so we wrestle with them and we need to know how to fight them. That’s what the passage is all about, the strongholds that find themselves in our lives.

They could be a host of different things. It could be because you’ve been hurt in your life. So because you’re hurt you developed a pattern inside of yourself of being angry when anybody even tries to hurt you. Or maybe you’ve been in an accident or something so now you feel anxious driving or anxious in a new relationship or anxious in some way, and that anxiety becomes this stronghold inside of your heart. Or maybe because of being abused or mistreated or something happening in life you develop this controlling approach to life. So you’re controlling. And of course each one of those strongholds within our lives damage relationships. They damage us and we miss out on some of the great things, the fullness of life that God would have for us. It’s those inner struggles that we’re talking about. And all of us face them. Every one of us has these challenges.

So we need to know how to deal with them in a way that can demolish them. That’s what the passage says in 2 Corinthians, to demolish them. We have to know what that looks like to be able to move forward. The idea here is there’s an enemy. And the enemy that we’re talking about now is not only Satan and his demons, but it’s something going on inside of us, these pretenses or these arguments inside of our hearts that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. “Oh I am so bad. I have failed so much. God can’t use me anymore.” Or “I’ve been so hurt that God’s word doesn’t apply to me in this area of forgiveness. That would not be possible. If I forgive this person, that would be totally outside of the bounds that God would have for me.” So we set up these pretenses inside that hinder our joy, that hinder our peace, that make it hard for us to love others, to take risks in relationships.

See, when we have a problem in life, whether it’s a satanic attack or, as we saw in the passage in 2 Timothy, the hardships that we have in life, we develop this inner challenge. It’s like there’s two different struggles. There’s the external struggle and maybe you have a physical problem in your life, a real problem that will go on and unless God heals you miraculously, it looks like it may continue on indefinitely. That is a real problem. But there’s also the inner problem of disappointment. The inner problem of fatigue that is the problem I’m talking about. That’s the stronghold.

There’s two different things here going on, you see. You may be in a relationship that’s really difficult and it will be this way forever. It doesn’t seem unless God intervenes that something in

a dramatic way is going to change. And so it's there. That's the external struggle. But there's an internal struggle of bitterness. There's an internal struggle of discontent. Which then results in all kinds of sarcasm or meanness or even just withdrawal in the relationship. That's the inner struggle. See the difference between the external struggle and the internal one that must be addressed in our own hearts, it's the inner one that I'm trying to focus in here. In the passage they are called strongholds. Inner struggles – we can call them personal demons, we can call them whatever we want, but we all have them. We are all faced with them, we all wrestle with them, and it's really challenging.

I know I listen to people share some of the challenges and the wrestling that they go through every day or every week. They're just in battle inside of them. It's a turmoil that's inside and it's robbing them. I feel so bad because those things rob us of something beautiful that God wants us to experience. God has placed us here in his world. Yes, there's going to be challenges. We live on a battleship, not a cruise ship. So if your goal is pleasure in life then you're missing something really important. We are in a battle. God's not taking the battle away. It's part of who we are.

But in the midst of that battle, there's something that we enjoy. And you should be experiencing God's presence and joy in your life every day. His mercies are new every morning. And we can enjoy those. They are a great thing.

If you're plagued by this inner turmoil, these inner struggles, these personal demons, these strongholds, then they need to be demolished. There's power available to demolish these strongholds that God makes available to us.

I want to ask the question, what is a stronghold? What is a stronghold anyway? A stronghold is an area of darkness within the heart of a person that causes ongoing spiritual and emotional and behavioral challenges. It's inside the heart. That's the good news in the sense that we have more control over that. Because we don't have control over that stuff that's out there. We have control of what's in the heart and it's this stronghold, it's an area of darkness. And you know because it's magnetic. It sucks you into that. It's painful to live there. But some people have the habit of going there regularly. And so the personal demon could be an addiction of some kind, whether it's an addiction to a substance or it's an addiction to work. Or it's an addiction to pornography. It's a go-to that sucks you in if you're not careful.

So these inner challenges that we have is what Paul is referring to in the passage. We need to be careful of those. You can be a Christian that attends church and you still have these inner demons that you wrestle with. You can be studying your Bible regularly and still have these struggles inside of your heart. These need to be fought with spiritual powers in order to address them. That's why we call this spiritual warfare. We all need to understand this idea of spiritual warfare. This isn't just for super-Christians. This is for every one of us. We must know this and must know the weapons and must know how to fight this, as it's talked about in the rest of the passage.

A stronghold is also a lie. A stronghold is a lie that we've accepted and allow to distort our view of life that affects our emotions and our relationships and our lifestyle. It's damaging. It's a lie.

Some people spend a lot of time justifying the lie. “Well if you lived in my shoes then you’d be the same way I am.” So they just build this circle around their lie to defend it and protect it because somehow that brings them some sort of comfort or something. I want you to know there’s a fullness of life that God offers us that requires that we demolish the strongholds. We have to get rid of them because they get in the way of what God wants to do.

Let me show you a couple other Bible verses that illustrate this same thing that we’re talking about here. In Ephesians 4:26-27, notice the spiritual emotional battle that’s taking place in our lives when Paul says – *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*. Oh we’ve probably all had that experience. You go to bed mad and you can’t get to sleep. Or you wake up in the middle of the night and you’re just festering this whole thing. You know we all have different ways of handling that.

I’m a problem solver, so if I get mad at somebody, I’m trying to figure out how to solve the problem. Other people are revenge people. They’re trying to get revenge on the other person. If you go to bed while you’re still angry, do you know what happens? Whoa.

*And do not give the devil a foothold*. See, there are ways that you can, if you’re not careful, open your heart up that’s protected by the saving grace of Jesus Christ so that Satan cannot get in. But in under disobedience if you open your heart up then Satan can get a foothold inside of your heart, the most precious and most important place in your life. And they become strongholds.

I would suggest this is kind of scary. It’s scary for me to think that some of my thinking patterns, my emotional responses can be opportunities for Satan to get a foothold. I don’t want him having anything to do with my life. But he’s so tricky, he’s so deceptive that he has the power, apparently, only when I give it to him by going to bed angry, for example, to allow him to have a foothold in my life. It’s dangerous.

We have to be on guard. So Peter knows this. Remember he’s the one that denied Christ three times. He’s the one who was often getting his foot in his mouth. He’s the guy who was talking out of turn, jumping out of boats, and other things, cutting people’s ears off. Okay. He was the guy who had a lot of challenges. So he gives these words. He says – *Be alert and of sober mind*. That’s clear thinking. Make sure you think well about this. Think clearly. *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*. He would love to rob you, to steal, to kill, and destroy in your life. He wants you to be plagued by fear. He wants you to be so sad about life situations that you’re so disappointed that you can’t do whatever you need to do. He wants you to be angry about life. He’s looking for ways to encourage in your heart these strongholds and we’ve got to be careful. So Peter is saying be alert. Be careful of it. It’s dangerous.

My goal today is primarily to help raise the awareness level so you understand that we are in a battle. That this is something we face every day. If you’re in the habit of just looking at God every once in a while, you’re in danger.

There’s some people who only come to church... Dianne calls them CEO Christians (Christmas and Easter Only). That’s not you obviously because it’s not Christmas or Easter and you’re here



today. So thank you. That's not you. But those people are missing something if they think spirituality just happens on those holidays. But there are other people who are just Sunday Christians. They just do their thing on Sunday, they contribute to what's happening on Sunday here, but then they're gone. And they're not engaged with the Lord during the week. Those people are in danger.

I just want to help you understand this is a daily thing. It's something that we fight every day. If we're going to deal with the personal struggles on the inside, then it's a daily struggle that we're going to work on in our own lives.

I want to make it clear that we can say to the devil or we can say to ourselves, "I am a Christian. I'm not perfect. I make mistakes. I mess up. But God's grace is bigger than my sins." Let's start right there. If we're going to knock the feet off our strongholds and get them out of our hearts we have to start with God's grace and recognize that He is bigger than any problem that we've experienced.

Now one of the lies of Satan is your problem is bigger than God can handle. When you start believing that, it's a lie. You have to start with this understanding, "Hey, I'm a Christian. I've asked Jesus Christ to live within my heart."

Now there are people who say, "I'm a Christian," who their measurement of Christianity is that they attend church or they obey rules or they're good people or something like that or they went to catechism when they were younger, graduated from CCD, or passed their first confession. So because of that, they are Christians. I've got to tell you, that's not what it means to be a Christian. What it means to be a Christian is to have Jesus Christ resident in your heart and living for Him as Lord of your life to be a Christian, to have trusted Him as your personal Lord and Savior. Not following a list of rules and regulations as you weigh in, certainly we do that, but it's not the way into the salvation experience. It's knowing Christ personally. I'm not perfect, I make mistakes, I mess up, but God's grace is bigger than my sins.

Another verse I really like is this one from Psalm 103:11. God's grace for you is greater than you can imagine. I just think those are great words to ponder. Because as you face that struggle within your own heart about your inadequacy or your fear or your anxiety or whatever you're dealing with inside of your heart, you just need to know that God's grace is greater than you could ever imagine. So Psalm 103:11 says – *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.* The psalmist takes this picture of how big. "What can I do to describe for you how big my love is?" God says. You know sometimes with kids, a child will say, "I love you this much," and the mom will say, "I love you *this* much." So God says, "I love you *that* much. As high as the heavens are above the earth."

Don't ever doubt God's love. It is big. Big enough to engulf any mistake that you've made, any problem you have. Any issues you're dealing with in your life, God's love is big.

Let's start with some basics here and let's knock out these strongholds in our lives. God wants to do some big things in our lives and this power that we have that God gives us is not something that is just a power that gets us saved; it's a power that strengthens us so that we can live the

beautiful life that God wants you to live. He wants you to live a beautiful life. Trouble free? No. You're still on the battleship. You're still going to face physical problems that are out there. You're still going to face relational problems, financial, problems. They're out there. But that doesn't mean that inside of your heart you're drawn down. Inside your heart you can experience joy in the midst of all of those things. Amen?

Ponder that this week, will you? Next week we're going to explore it a little bit more and we're going to talk about how. How are we going to deal with these strongholds? The passage has some clues, continue reading in 2 Corinthians 10:1-5. We'll probably stick right on those verses right there as we continue on next week.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

Maybe today as you're listening to this message you're recognizing that these personal demons or strongholds in your life need more than just human solutions to deal with. They need supernatural solutions to address them. Too many people use physical solutions to deal with spiritual challenges inside the heart. I want to suggest there are spiritual solutions and powers that can address those. God will reveal those to you and He can empower you with those.

Maybe you need prayer this morning just to deal with your own heart, to deal with what's going on in your own life. I want to invite you to come up for prayer. We have prayer counselors up here who are willing to pray for you and your own challenges. I have oil with me if you want prayer for healing. And if you want to pray for someone else too, we'll pray with you on that level too.

Let's use this tool that God has given, one of the tools that we have are fighting Satan's influences is prayer. Let's use it powerfully this morning as we come before the Lord. In your own prayer time, as you listen to this song as we sing about the power of Jesus, but also just if you want prayer with someone else, come on up and let's pray with you together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we know that we have these deeds. Lord, your Holy Spirit has this ability to put a finger right on the area that needs to be challenged in our lives. So do that now, we ask. I pray that you would help us to have repentant hearts if sin is in the way that needs to be removed. I pray that you would give us open hearts so that we can absorb new information and not be closed off to the grace that you have for us. Do that now in these next few minutes. Do ministry in our hearts, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's sing together.