

"Overcoming Criticism" - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

This morning, I would like to take a look at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. We want to look at really the "weapons of our warfare"; how to deal with being criticized; how to overcome being criticized in your life. And Paul now, in 2 Corinthians 10, is being criticized in his ministry. He is now having to defend his ministry in chapters 10, 11 and 12, because many of the Judeizers had come back into the church of Corinth and had begin to criticize Paul. **"They said, concerning Paul that he is weighty in his letters but he is weak in his presence."** And though he was difficult to look on, he was pretty incredible to deal with. And Paul very simply said to these guys, "Listen, unless you repent, I'm going to come, and when I get there, we're going to see who is really weak."

And so Paul now is standing, really, for the commitment of Christ. He is being challenged by those and questioned by the church of Corinth, that he had really birthed in his own heart. He doesn't understand, and we'll get to this later on in 11 and 12, how they could turn on him, as these false teachers had been taking so much from them, and he had given so much to them. And so he is now beginning to question them. But what I find interesting is how he responds and what he says about the criticism towards his life. And we pick up this morning in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, **"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"** Let me read that to you once again. **"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:** (or after criticism or after

what people say about us) **For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,** (they're not fleshly) **but they're mighty through God to the pulling down of the stronghold;** (satanic powers: strongholds) **Casting down imaginations,** (fantasies, imagery, idols) **and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity** (the arresting officer of the Holy Spirit) **every thought to the obedience of Christ;"**

Well, Father, we ask that every one of us has been criticized in our lives one time or another; or Lord, things that have been said about us and we have not always reacted in the way that you would desire. And so I pray that you would open our eyes, give us a bigger picture; help us to understand that, Lord, that we do not fight against flesh and blood but Lord, we fight against the principalities and powers. And that Lord, we are to be wise; we are to understand the enemy. And Lord, we are to enjoy the equipment of your Spirit that you have given to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The word here, "warfare", in verse 4, means: campaign. And it's interesting that this is not just a little misunderstanding that Paul was talking about in this chapter. It is far beyond just a misunderstanding from a group of guys talking about his ministry. Paul sees this as a flat out open attack of the enemy upon his life. It's interesting to me how we waste, I believe, so many hours within our life worrying and trying to figure out things because we allow our minds to go crazy when people begin to say things about us. Paul wouldn't go down that road. He understood that when people were seeking to destroy his ministry that he was going to look beyond them and see Satan, and the real battle would be between God and Satan. And Paul was one that had the ability to confront. Also had the confidence that he believed that God was in and through his life. And so he says that this was a campaign of Satan seeking to destroy his life, to ruin the very work of God in his life and to dysfunction the very things that he was

hoping of the grace of God to do in the Corinthians' lives. And so we find right here that real Christianity is not a playground; it's a battlefield and it's something that Satan desires for you to not look at because he doesn't want you to understand the importance of warfare. Really, prayer is nothing less than warfare against the attacks of the enemy. And so we look at the church and we look at our lives, and what is the one thing that we see is the weakest thing within our life? And that is prayer. And what is the one great piece of equipment the Holy Spirit has given to you to find victory within your life? Prayer. And we know that prayer now becomes that decisive moment within the battle when you begin to pray for your spouse, when you begin to pray about being single, when you begin to pray about being a single parent or you begin to pray for your grandchildren. God begins to move in ways that you could never believe before and all the fighting and all the worrying and all the things we've done before just do not make a lot of difference. But the "weapons of our warfare" - those are the things that bring down the stronghold within our life. And so God desires that you would know the enemy, and He wants you to recognize Him. He wants you to understand the importance of resisting him and He wants you once again to refuse the very things that he wants to do in and through your life.

And so in verses 3, 4 and 5, there are three things I'd like to look at this morning. Number one in verse 3: our walk; and then in verse 4: our weapon; and then lastly in verse 5: the warfare. And so the walk, the weapon and the warfare are all found in these verses 3, 4 and 5. In verse 3 he declares concerning our walk, he says **"...though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:"** So we do not war after the flesh. You remember there in Ephesians, in chapter 6, Paul said it in a different way. He said, **"Put on the whole armor of God,"** in 6:11, **"that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of**

this world, against the spiritual wickedness in high places.” So Paul is going for the very throat of the kingdom of Satan. He says there are powers, there are dominions, there are principalities and there are rulers of darkness that we rule and go against in our lives. And then he said in verse 13, **“Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day...”** So there’s going to come a day that becomes so incredibly evil that you are going to be able to stand it, **“... having done all, to stand.”** So Paul talks about these incredible wiles of the devil, and how you and I are to stand. And we are to fight in the realm of the Spirit and we are to know that he is a principality, powers, dominion. And we are to once again allow the Spirit of God to work in and through our lives. Peter said it in a different way; he talks about the adversary: **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”** (1 Peter 5:8) But I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed, very simply he says here, **“be sober, be vigilant because your adversary...”** not everybody else’s adversary, but your adversary. So we know that Satan has you pegged. We know that the enemy desires to take you out. We know that from this day forward, he’ll never take his hands or his eyes off of you. And he’ll wait for that moment through a whole life seeking to take you away from the heart of God. He knows that he’s lost you because your heart is secure; but the one thing that is not secure is the mind. And so Satan goes after your mind, and that is the one thing that you need to yield your minds to the authority of the Word of God. And where the battle is fought in the Christian walk - it is fought in the mind. It is in the imaginations and the fantasies where we lose the battles because we allow Satan to get inside and begin to whisper. We begin to question God within our minds and we begin to make decisions that are not pleasing to the Lord. So the work of the Holy Spirit is after your mind, Satan is after your mind, and whoever you yield your members to obey, his servant you now become. So the battle is in the mind; and God desires that we would give that, and so he said, “your adversary”. And that’s important to understand. Satan, though he

cannot claim you, is seeking to make you sterile, hoping that he can discourage you, hoping that he can bring you down, and hoping that you would never share Christ with anyone. And so he knows you're going to Heaven, but he's going to try to do everything he can to make your life miserable upon this earth. And you don't need to do that. Two thousand years ago, Christ died and the battle was won. We need to mop up and begin to walk in victory and believe that Satan has been destroyed: **"...and greater is He that is in you than he that's in the world."** (1 John 4:4)

You know, there's an interesting story that kind of helps me here to understand, really, the walk of the believer. It's a story found in Nehemiah 6, and you don't need to turn there, but it's kind of an interesting chapter. I believe in verses 1 through 11 it talks about just some interesting things, but basically four things Nehemiah tells us in chapter 6. When the wall was done, the walls of Jerusalem, there were two interesting characters named Tobiah and Sanballat. And the moment the wall was done, the Bible says the gates had not been hung. And Tobiah and Sanballat knew that their time was running out, that they were now losing this war against the servant of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been sent, you remember, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He had a letter by the King Artaxerxes. He was once a cupbearer, he was now going to be a builder; eventually he would be a governor. He was now bringing the people together and they were building in their own backyard. They had built this wall in some 52 days and all there was left to do was to put the gates on the outside of the walls. But Satan knew exactly where Nehemiah was at and Tobiah and Sanballat said unto themselves, "he is about ready to hang the gates; if we're going to attack, we better do it now". And the first thing we find that Tobiah and Sanballat did is they came to Nehemiah, 6:2, and they said to Nehemiah, **"Hey come out to Ono and let's have lunch together."** And the Bible says that they were seeking to put an ambush against Nehemiah.

So the first way that Satan comes against your life is to draw you away from what you're doing; from the work of God within your life. Nehemiah said, **"I'm doing a great work for God. Why should I leave and come to Ono?"** Now, if someone says to you "come to Ono" just say, "Oh, no." Don't go there. I mean that's kind of obvious, personally. But the name of the city was Ono and so, "come to Ono" and Nehemiah said, "No." But interesting, there it declares that four times Tobiah and Sanballat kept coming against Nehemiah seeking to draw him out, because Satan is never going to let you off the hook. And so finally he said, "Listen, no. I'm not going. I'm not going to allow you to draw me away from what God has called me to do."

Secondly, when that didn't happen, we find that Tobiah and Sanballat were driving Nehemiah up, seeking to bring him to an area of pride within his life. When they couldn't draw him away from the work of God, in chapter 6 it said , very simply, that they wrote a letter and the letter was against him. It was a rumor seeking to cause him much pain. And the letter very simply said, **"This Nehemiah is seeking to be your king. He is seeking to hire prophets that they would prophesy saying that he would be the king."** And this letter was circulated even to the enemies, and their hope was that the enemy would see that there would be another king named Nehemiah. Well, Nehemiah did not write the letter, it was not in his heart. He was humble before the Lord and so he said, **"No, I didn't write the letter."** But what I do find out is interesting, is they were seeking to bring harm into his life. Hoping that he would react. Hoping that he would respond. Hoping that he would get in the flesh and hoping that he would defend his position - but he didn't. He trusted in God. And sometimes where Satan cannot draw you out, he'll seek to lift you up and allow your anger to begin to take over. How dare them? How can they do this? I need to stand up for myself. I need to fight for who I am. And now I find myself in that arena of the flesh.

And thirdly, when that didn't work, we find that in Nehemiah chapter 6, that they caused or tried to get Nehemiah to come inside the temple. And Nehemiah said, **"Why do you want me to come inside the temple? Are you seeking to have me sin? Do you not know that I am not a priest? And why should I hide? Why should such a man as I flee into the temple? I've done nothing wrong and I will not do it."** The third attack is kind of interesting because they were hoping to have Nehemiah sin against his God. It would be like saying to you, "Go commit adultery and sin against God." And God is going to have to deal with you. And God might have to take something away from you or God might need to take a ministry away from you. In other words, they're seeking to cause him to sin. And Nehemiah said, "No." He understood they were seeking to wipe him out.

And then the last thing it says in chapter 6, is they were seeking to drain his life. And we read very simply that when (a) they couldn't draw him out and (b) they couldn't lift him up in pride and (c) they couldn't really drive him into sin, (d) what they sought to do is, Judah married into the family of Tobiah and Sanballat. And so his relatives were now part of Tobiah and Sanballat and daily he had to put up with these guys. And so Satan often times seeks to pull you away from the work of God, or he seeks to lift you up in pride, or he desires that you would sin against God, or he just wants to beat you down and drain you to the point that you come and are exhausted with your life - and so the danger of our walk before the Lord. And so Nehemiah, to all of these attempts said, **"No, I'm doing a great work for God; leave me alone."** And that is to be your answer; we're not to walk in the flesh.

And secondly, he mentions in verse 4 "our warfare"; notice the weapons of our warfare. **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds."** (2 Corinthians 10:4) Now underline the words "mighty through God." And let me just give you

a couple of examples and then I'll bring it to a close. It says in Judges 7:20 and 21, **"And the three companies blew the trumpets, and broke the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host (of the Midians) ran, and cried, and fled."** So in the Hebrew it really does not say "the sword of Gideon," it says, "Gideon and God."

The first thing that I need to see about the "weapons of my warfare" is that God is going to fight the battles in my life. And God is going to use supernatural ways to destroy the very things that are coming against me. So it's not uncommon for God to reduce me. It's not uncommon for God to use the weakness of my flesh. It's not uncommon for God to take my failures and to turn them into tremendous building blocks for the kingdom of God because He wants the glory. He wants to be praised. He wants to be recognized within our lives. It says in 2 Kings 6:15-17, and I don't want you turning, but just listen to the story of Elijah and you remember the servant at Dothan. And it says that when the servant rose up in the morning, he looked out and he realized that the Syrians had him totally surrounded. He went back and woke up the master and he said, **"Master, master, we are surrounded."** And Elijah says, **"And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them"** in 2 Kings 6:16. **"And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eye, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."** And so God opened the young man's eyes. I imagine Elisha never got out of bed. He said, "Oh, God, open this guy's eyes so I can go back to bed." And around the Syrians were what? The angels of the Lord; they encamp around the righteous. And God opened the young man's eyes because they're more with us than with them.

Then you remember Jehoshaphat, in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, the very same thing happened to him. It says once again concerning this incredible moment of the Moabs and the Ammonites, **"...for the battle is not yours but God's."** In 2 Chronicles, 20:15, **The battle is not yours but God's.** Verse 17, **"Ye shall not need to fight this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."** In verse 18: **"...worshipping the Lord."** And then in verse 22, **"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon,..."** and destroyed them. And so Hezekiah, all he had to do was once again begin to worship the Lord and God destroyed the enemy.

And let me give you one more. Kind of interesting in 2 Chronicles 32:1-7, Sennacherib said, **"I'm going to destroy you, Hezekiah."** And Hezekiah brought the letter before the Lord. And it says in 2 Chronicles 32:7, **"Be strong and courageous; be not afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us,..."** In other words, the battle is not yours. The weapons are spiritual; the weapons are for the pulling down of the strong man. And God desires to fight every one of your battles. But once again he wants you not to fight from the flesh, but from the realm of the Spirit. And notice he says, "the stronghold" in 2 Corinthians 10:4, **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds;"** In other words, they become extremely strong. And those strongholds are like the city of Jericho. They have been allowed to build and work within your life.

Often times we allow imaginations and we allow things to be built within our lives. We allow sin to go on. We allow the compromise in what we do subconsciously as we begin to hand Satan a brick. And as he begins to build, all of a sudden that very seed becomes a thought and that very thought becomes a desire. And that very desire becomes a wish and that very wish becomes the very sin that destroys us. And so these high towers are those areas in our lives that Satan has the ability to mock us, to baffle us; oh, we've tried to get rid of them, but we just can't. We've asked God to take them. We have fought with all of our hearts. We have read, we have fasted, we have done everything, but they stand before us and they mock us and they stand before our victory in Christ.

But Joshua was given the answer. In Joshua, chapter 6 it very simply says that listen, I have given to you this city. I want you to walk around it. I want you to see it. I want you to be quiet and on the seventh day, I want you to shout and I want you to worship. And that city was destroyed because of that presence of God within the life of the believer. If you're ever going to get rid of the strongholds; if you're ever going to bring them down in a very powerful way, it's going to be as you live in the presence of God and you learn to worship God. That this is bigger than you are, that this is stronger than you think and that this person is not the issue. It's not your husband, it's not your wife; quit fighting. It's not your children; quit getting angry with them. It's not your boss or it's not your friends. You are in a spiritual battle. **"We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers..."** (Ephesians 6:12) And Satan is seeking to use people to get you to a point that you walk away from God or you just completely say, "I quit." When you understand that it's not them, it's bigger than them. It's not the rumors, it's bigger than them. Paul said, **"Listen, we walk in the flesh but we do not war in the flesh."** (2 Corinthians 10:3)

You begin to bring your children before God. You ask God to fill them with the power of the Holy Spirit; you bind the works of Satan within their lives. You ask God to open their minds to see the goodness of God and you begin to pray those kids into the kingdom and you begin to ask God to set them free. It is a spiritual thing. You pray for your wife, Lord, you pray for your husband, for your spouse, whatever it might be, for being single. In other words, it's not about being married; it's about something bigger. Satan is using the single life to destroy you, to make you feel lonely. This is that moment in your life that you need to draw closer to God. Don't let Satan do it. Don't let him put those thoughts in your mind. Think on that which is good, that which is lovely, and that which is kind. And so we find very simply that Jericho came down because they were worshipping.

And then I read in verse 5, "our warfare", and so our walk, and our weapons. And then notice in verse 5, our warfare, **"casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"** There's an interesting picture in Ezekiel, chapter 8:9-10, and we don't have time to get there, but it talks about God taking Ezekiel by the back of his hair. I don't have any hair so I wouldn't experience that, but he had a good head of hair and the Spirit of God yanked him by the back of the hair and took him over to Jerusalem. And he took him inside this wall that there was a hole; took him underneath the city and on that city wall was pornography and every creepy, filthy thing. And then God said to Ezekiel, **"These are the thoughts of the people of God"**. These are the thoughts of my priests. These are the ones who up above are telling people to worship God, but in their hearts, they are corrupt. They've allowed these imaginations, this pornography. They've allowed this unholy thing to dominate their lives and it needs to be cast down.

You say, "Well, Steve, I've allowed that to happen. How do I cast it down?" Well, again, I begin to believe that you have to look at the Bible. In the story of Gideon, how he threw the vessel and began to shine, and that's a great story; I love that story. But there's another truth to the story that we miss. Before that even happened, before the victory even came, check this out: It says that God said to Gideon, **"Go back to your father's house and cast down the altar and sacrifice two oxen; a young oxen and a seven year old oxen and bring it there before me."** (Judges 6) And so he went with ten men and they tore down this image and they cast it down and they used that young bullock to do it. And then they took the 7-year-old and they sacrificed it. And the oxen is the symbol of Christ. And so I come to realize that the only victory I'm going to get over my mind is the cross at Calvary. I need God to take the blood of Christ and cleanse my mind. I need Jesus Christ, by the power of worship, to take me around the city of Jericho and destroy it. You see, Paul was saying, **"we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers."** (Ephesians 6:12) You are going to walk in the flesh, but you're not to war after the flesh. Satan is going to seek to draw you out; don't go. Satan is going to seek to lift you up; don't go there. He's going to seek to drive you into some sin in your life; resist it. He's going to seek to make you tired and exhausted and drain your life; don't listen to him. Walk in the Spirit as He is in the Spirit.

And then we find in verse 4, he says that to, **"...pull down and to cast down, pull down every stronghold."** Satan is going to seek to build a stronghold, one brick at a time. He's going to take one thought. He's going to build that thought. He's going to add to that thought. He's going to bring that negative thought into your mind. And the Bible says that as a man thinketh so is he and you're going to begin to see that you're not important. And then you're never going to be important; then you're never going to be anything in your life. And all you are is a puppet and God doesn't love you and so why serve Him? Go out

and get drunk. Well, it makes sense. I mean if you're nothing, you're never going to be nothing, there's no hope in your life, then you probably ought to go out there and get drunk. But that's not what the Bible says, it says that **"...you are chosen."** (John 15:16) And you are special and you need to come back at Satan with the word of God with the weapons of the sword of the Spirit. And you need to hack him by the grace of God with the sword. Jesus said, **"It is written..."** (Matthew 4) He says, **"It is written,"** so He wasn't praying, He was using the sword of God upon Satan. That is a weapon; the ability to come down with the three to four foot sword on top of that Roman soldier's metal helmet and crack it open is what God is saying. You take the sword and you bring down and destroy the very thing that Satan is seeking to do. But the tragic thing is that 2000 years ago Christ died. And the victory was given to you. And there's just a lot of mopping up that needs to be done, but the mopping up becomes kind of brutle. And God is seeking to work and cleanse and work in my heart, but He wants me to take the sword and take prayer and begin to make a decisive factor within my life. Satan never will want you to pray and the last thing we do is pray. And it is the most powerful, the most powerful weapon that God has given to you. And we don't do it because we live in the flesh, we fight in the flesh, we think about the flesh, we love the flesh. But God is saying if you live in this flesh you are not to war after this flesh. You are to get down on your hands and knees and the decisive factor of your children, of your business, of the church is prayer, and we don't do it.

And the second decisive thing in the battle is what? The word of God. And the two areas that the church is ignorant is in the word of God and in prayer and Satan has us whipped because we don't understand the enemy and we have no clue to what the equipment is. God wants you to know your enemy because he's after you. And second, God wants you to be equipped to wipe him out in the authority of Jesus Christ. When that thought comes into your mind, you arrest it by the power of the Holy Spirit. That thought is not of God. That imagination is

not of God. And if you dwell upon that imagination, it will turn into a reality and that reality is going to take you out. You fantasize, you look; satan will plant that seed, and then he'll plant that desire, and then he'll plant that hope and then he'll fulfill that thing. And when lust is conceived, it brings forth sin and when sin is finished, it brings forth death. Don't go down that road. Cast it down, pull it down.

And then lastly it says here in verse 5, "**casting down imaginations, and every high thing...**" and so the importance of understanding that if I'm going to cast it down, it's going to be through the power of the cross. And if I'm going to pull it down, it's going to be once again by a life of worship. And so I want to challenge you this morning. Do not allow the enemy to rob you. But I would rather have you on your knees with your hands in the air worshipping God and asking God to give you victory over the habits in your life, taking the word of God, praying your heart out and standing against the wiles of the devil. I think that's the way that God wants us to fight.

"Oh, well, she doesn't like me." Well, who cares? "Well, my boss doesn't like me." Well, okay. Paul said, "These guys are talking about me." Well that's a lot of criticism; how do you handle that criticism? You just know where it's coming from. Criticism is not from God; it's from the devil. Fighting is not from God; it's from the devil. Pride is not from God; it's from the devil. It's from the earthly things; we don't fight there. We fight where? On our knees and in our heart before God. Quit fighting. Quit it and start praying and binding the strong man.

Closing prayer:

Father, we thank you for your hand of kindness upon our lives. How we fight, we bicker, Lord, we mess around with each other's minds. And Father, we find

that that's exactly what Satan wants us to do. Lord, our minds need to be consecrated to the Almighty God; that we are to think on that which is lovely and that which is kind and that which is gentle. And that Lord, that we are to cast every imagination and fantasy before you. And that God, that you are to pull down everything, every strong tower in our life. And Father, the only way that we know how to do that, is by the realm of Your Spirit. So, God, as Joshua held his hands up and shouted at the walls of Jericho; Father, the walls came down inside out. And God, as we just lift our hands, we say to you, Lord, give me victory. This battle is not of you. I have given to you this battle. More are they with you than they that are with the enemy. They fight by the arm of flesh but we fight by the Living God. And so you've given to us the victory. And God we ask that you would pull down these strong towers, these strongholds that we have in our lives. And God, we ask that you would cast down the imaginations; that Lord we would bring them to the cross of Jesus Christ. And so, Lord, we thank you that you have our spirits. But Lord, this morning we give you our minds. And we ask that we would be transformed and renewed by the washing and regenerating of Your Word. That God that you would heal our minds. That God that you would give us clear minds and a pure mind. That God, that you would sanctify our minds before you. Lord, that is where the battle is fought, that is where the imagination explodes, and that is where we go crazy within our heads. Lord, get a hold of these heads and Father, we pray for, like Christ, to have this mind that was in Christ Jesus; a mind that was focused upon the Father's will. Help us to see beyond each other. Help us to understand that half the battles in our life are not even human, they're satanic. That we are to stand against the wiles of the enemy and we will thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.