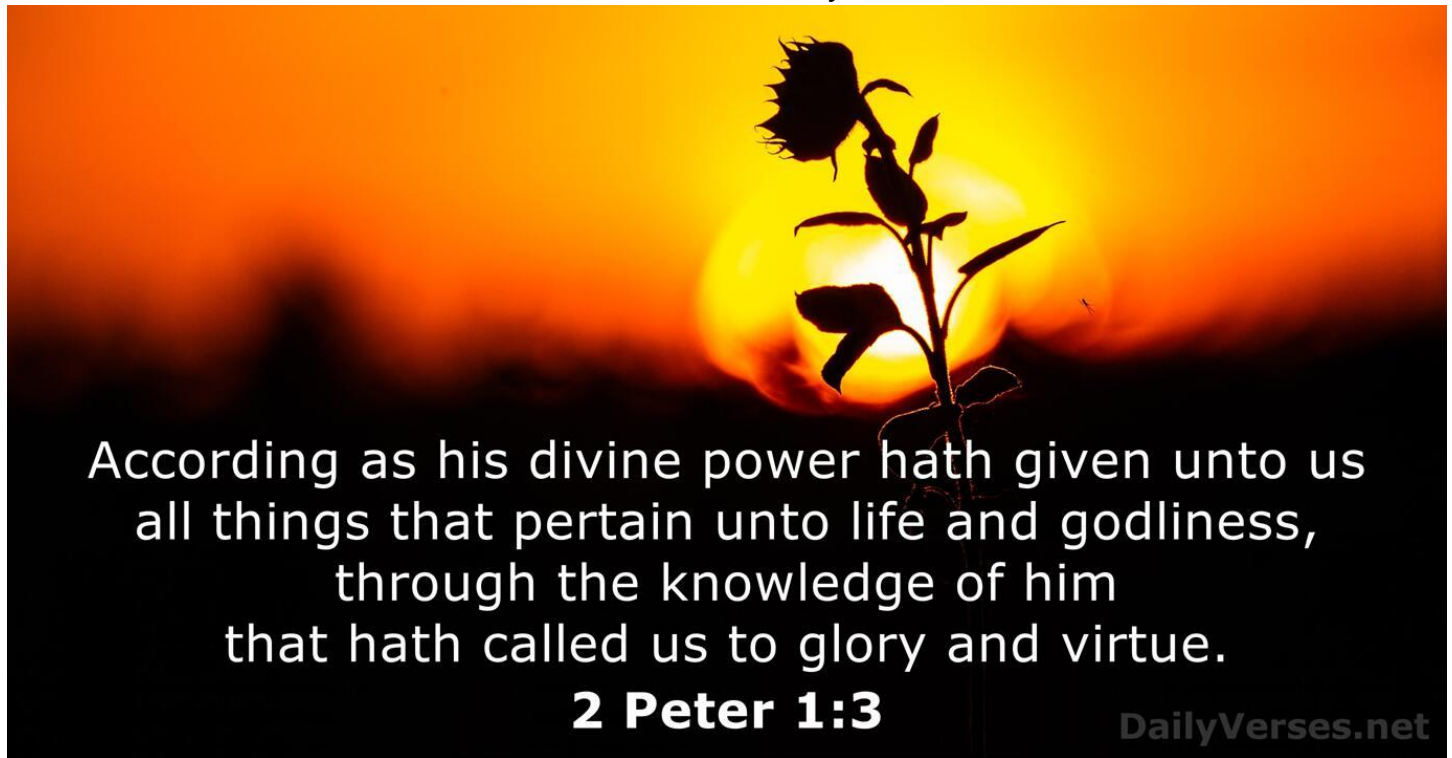


Every Thought Captive II Corinthians 10:1-6 FBC Canton Sunday am May 17, 2026

Introduction: Walking in truth produces great rejoicing. II John

How do we walk in the truth?

II Corinthians 10 tells us how to do so on any issue of life. II Peter 1:3



So we are going to unpack how to use the truth to walk the truth out in our lives.

We should not use another source for truth; artificial intelligence is inferior to almighty insight.

New research from the Barna Group found that nearly one-third of practicing Christians believe spiritual advice from AI is as trustworthy as advice from a pastor. Among Gen Z and Millennials, that number climbs to roughly 40%. The study also found that four in ten Christians say AI has already helped them with prayer, Bible study or spiritual growth.

Artificial intelligence can be useful for organizing information or quickly finding Bible verses. But there is a dangerous difference between using AI as a tool and treating it as a spiritual authority. Many young people are beginning to blur that line.

The greatest danger is that AI sounds confident even when it is wrong. Chatbots present answers instantly, smoothly and persuasively. For younger users raised in a digital world, confidence often feels like truth. But AI systems do not possess wisdom, discernment, conviction or spiritual maturity. They are predictive algorithms trained on enormous amounts of internet data -- including biased information, contradictory theology, false teachings and outright misinformation.

In other words, AI does not "know" God. It predicts what a human might want to hear about God.

That distinction matters enormously.

Researchers studying AI and spirituality have warned that modern AI systems are not worldview-neutral. One recent academic paper examining AI and Christianity found that many systems default toward what researchers called "procedural secularism," producing answers that often lack theological coherence and drift away from historic Christian teaching.

This creates a subtle but serious spiritual problem. AI often adapts itself to the user. If someone wants affirmation, the algorithm tends to provide affirmation. If someone wants progressive theology, legalism, universalism or moral compromise, the AI can often generate responses that reinforce those preferences. Instead of challenging the heart, it mirrors it.

That is not discipleship. That is digital self-confirmation.

Fla.: Family of FSU mass shooting victim sues OpenAI, alleging ChatGPT aided in attack planning.

The 76-page complaint asserts that the suspected shooter, Phoenix Ikner, utilized the artificial intelligence as a tactical consultant to refine his plans over several months, including the days immediately preceding the attack that claimed two lives.

Representing the family, attorney Bakari Sellers revealed that the digital trail includes approximately 16,000 "disturbing chats" spanning an 18-month period, during which the chatbot reportedly provided specific logistical advice and mental reinforcement for the shooter's delusions.

The lawsuit contends that by failing to trigger alerts or implement sufficient guardrails against such prolonged, violent inquiries, the company played a direct role in facilitating the commission of a crime.

"This is the same person who asked, you know, how can he become infamous? He asked about the Columbine shooting. He asked about what time should he go to campus? What time are most people going to be there?" said Sellers.

"He literally utilized open AI and Chat GPT as his co-conspirator, utilized it as a resource to carry out mass murder. There was nothing in place to prevent that from happening

- i. There are many different strongholds.
- ii. They all have in common deception...we don't think we have them.
 - 1. Sexual immorality.
 - 2. Witchcraft.
 - 3. Insecurity and fear.
 - 4. False prophecy.
 - 5. Rebellion.
 - 6. Rejection.
 - 7. Bitterness and jealousy.
 - 8. Depression.

ii. Origin of stronghold of pride and control. 'I will of Satan.'

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north! I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!" Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit.

*Isaiah 14:12-15
talktotheword.com*

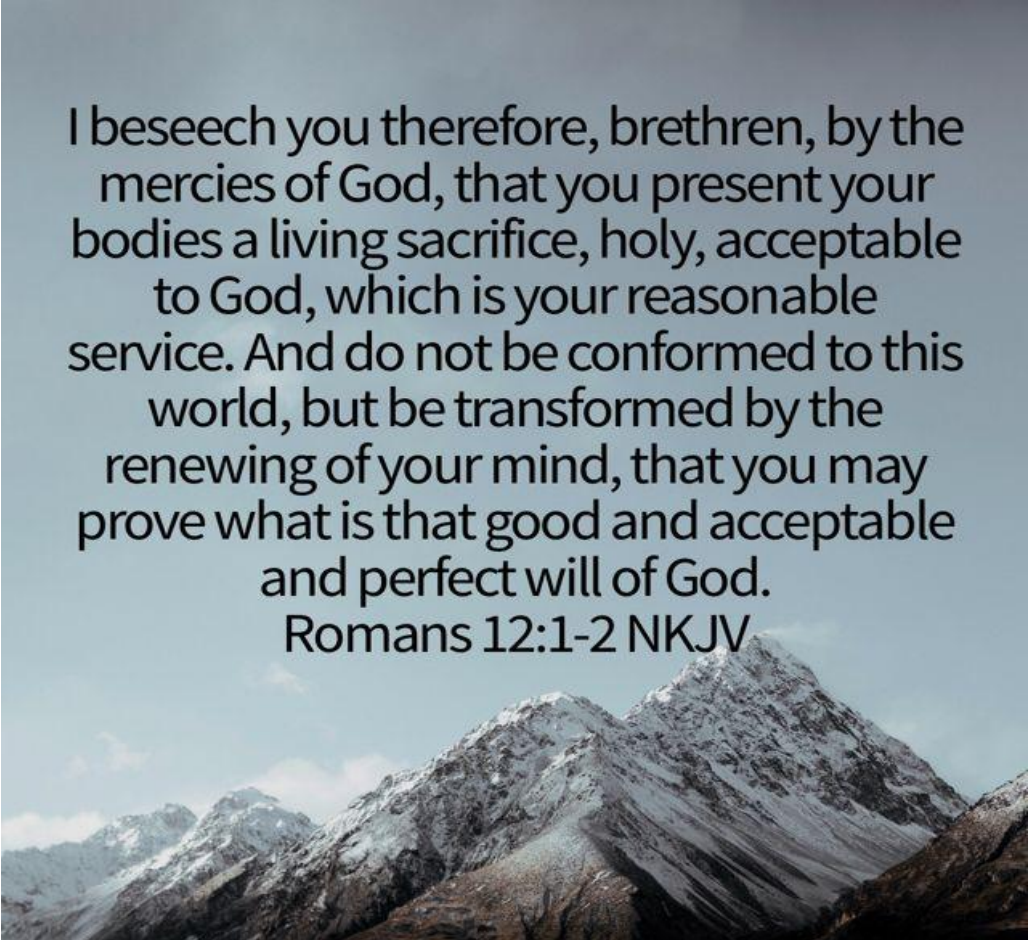
iii. Evidence of the Stronghold.

- 1. Ungrateful.
- 2. Unteachable.
- 3. Self-righteous.
- 4. Self-centered.
- 5. Insensitive.
- 6. Materialistic.
 - a. The only one who can do it cheaply.
 - b. The only who can buy the best.
- 7. Seeks positions and titles, desiring recognition.
- 8. Stubborn.
- 9. Mocking.
- 10. Vain, therefore constantly comparing.
- 11. Spiritual adultery.
- 12. Impatient.
- 13. Slander and gossip=thinks about rumors first.

14. Manipulative of others through outbursts of humor, anger, or volume.
15. Scheming, and intrigues.
16. Lack of trust in authority.
17. Plays the devil's advocate.
18. Striving, forming cliques.

b. How to defeat strongholds: Philippians 4:13

i. Bring every thought captive to Jesus. V. 5, Romans 12:1-2



I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

1.

ii. Deny self. Matthew 16:24

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

iii. Confess and repent. I John 1:9

1. Otherwise we are creating a cycle of stagnation:

- a. 1. Blaming circumstances.
- b. 2. Blaming others.
- c. 3. Justifying ourselves.
- d. 4. Avoiding conflict...i.e. avoiding the conviction of God

iv. Put off the old man and put on the new. Ephesians 4:17-32

Conclusion: Ready to face punishment for disobedience or ready to obey?

The Bible Says

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 Meaning

In [2 Corinthians 10:1-6](#), Paul begins a preamble to a direct defense of his apostolic integrity. He will prepare the Corinthians for his personal visit, encouraging them to adopt a new perspective/attitude toward him and toward their walk. The Corinthians will be exhorted to clean up the mess among them that is due to false teaching.

Paul begins by expressing a desire for the Corinthians to look at him through a spiritual rather than a physical lens and focus on Christ rather than men:

Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh (vs. 1-2).

After discussing the collection of a financial offering to aid needy believers in Judea in Chapters 8-9, Paul resumes his response to an attack on his apostleship in Chapters 10-13. He mentioned in the early part of the letter that he delayed coming to see them in person to spare them sorrow, apparently due to corrective action needed ([2 Corinthians 2:1](#)).

Paul has already defended his apostleship in this letter. For example, he asserted “For we are not like many, peddling the word of God” ([2 Corinthians 2:17](#)). He spoke of “beginning to commend ourselves” in [2 Corinthians 3:1](#). He said, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord” in [2 Corinthians 4:5](#), and “we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one” in [2 Corinthians 7:2](#).

We can infer from the earlier chapters and Chapters 10-12 that Paul’s opponents were, as usual, attempting to undermine and delegitimize his authority as an apostle. Their goal was to thwart his gospel message of God’s grace and replace it with another ([2 Corinthians 11:4](#)).

Paul does not walk *according to the flesh*. This means he is not living according to the ways of the world. He is not peddling the word of God, seeking financial gain as his primary motive. In [1 Corinthians 9](#), Paul had to defend himself against criticism that he was not a legitimate apostle because he did not take money, rather choosing to pay his own way ([1 Corinthians 9:3-4](#)).

Apparently, the critics claimed he was an “amateur” rather than a “pro.” He will again defend against this argument in this letter ([2 Corinthians 11:7-8](#)).

But in this letter, he also appears to have to defend the opposite claim; accusers in political fights like these are not typically bound by consistency. In [2 Corinthians 2:17](#), he asserted he is not using his position of authority for financial gain. In [2 Corinthians 8:18-20](#), Paul appointed a group of trusted brothers to collect an offering, so that Paul would be above reproach, demonstrating “None of this money is coming to me.” This again infers that he was under suspicion from claims he was a profiteer. He will say in [2 Corinthians 12:14](#) “I do not seek what is yours,” again insisting that he is not seeking funds to go into his pocket.

In verse 2, Paul has a request: *I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some.*

The [some](#) people in their midst *who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh* would seem to refer to those who regard Paul merely as a peddler of the gospel, a profiteer seeking personal gain. They might regard that Paul is primarily seeking money for himself.

We can also presume that the [some](#) that Paul wants them to deal with prior to his visit includes dealing with the competing Jewish “authorities” who are seeking to displace Paul and pull the Corinthians under their authority. Paul speaks of them as presenting another Jesus and a different gospel ([2 Corinthians 11:4](#)).

Paul calls his competing Jewish opponents “false apostles” ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#)) who are pulling the Corinthians into an abusive and exploitative relationship ([2 Corinthians 11:20](#)). It might be that the [some](#) includes these false apostles who might be in their midst. It could also be disciples of these false apostles who need to be dealt with. In either case, Paul’s desire is that the Corinthian leadership properly deal with these things prior to his arrival.

Carrying forward the context of Chapters 8 and 9 which speak of money, we can infer that a part of what Paul is asking the Corinthians to take care of includes a controversy about his financial integrity. He will say later that he will deal with all issues if they don’t ([2 Corinthians 13:2](#)). But he makes it clear here that his strong preference is that they deal with it themselves.

Paul appears to be requesting them to put the controversies about his financial integrity, apostolic authority, and other criticisms behind them before he arrives. He will spend much of this chapter and the following chapters setting forth a case that ought to settle the point. Paul will lay out a case for the legitimacy and integrity of his apostleship that is exceedingly compelling. He will demonstrate that his primary earthly “reward” for his apostolic service has been intense suffering for the gospel—the precise opposite of financial prosperity. This should give them sufficient information to settle the matter.

Paul begins his admonition to be spared from defending his apostleship and financial integrity in person. He began Chapter 10 with the phrase *I, Paul, myself*. He uses repetition to emphasize that this is a very personal request. This is something that matters much to Paul. What he desires is to *urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you* to not have to refute the allegations of his apostolic integrity when he comes to see the Corinthians in person.

Paul uses the word *urge*, the same Greek word he uses in [Romans 12:1](#) when he says “I urge you” to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. He makes an appeal (*urge*) to the Corinthians and that appeal does not come as a command. This will be the choice of the Corinthians. Paul will present facts that ought to inform that choice. The facts will demonstrate his intense suffering. [2 Corinthians 10:1](#) through [2 Corinthians 11:21](#) can be viewed as a prelude to Paul’s direct defense of his apostolic integrity. His direct defense, beginning in [2 Corinthians 11:22](#), will feature a listing of the intense suffering he has endured for sharing the gospel.

A possible scenario is that these final chapters, 10-13, were written considerably later than the previous chapters. We would expect that a lengthy letter like this might be written over a period of time. We can imagine that something took place that caused Paul to add these chapters with a somewhat sharper defense of his apostolic integrity than he had previously given.

Paul’s assertion in [2 Corinthians 11:22](#) provides a clue that the controversy is between he, who is a Jew, and other Jews who claim apostolic authority; men he calls “false apostles” ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#)). Just prior to listing the intense suffering he has endured, Paul says:

“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

([2 Corinthians 11:22](#))

We can infer from this verse that Paul’s adversaries are fellow Jews who are competing “authorities.” This is the same scenario he addressed in his letters to Roman and Galatian Gentile believers ([Romans 2:17](#), [24](#), [Galatians 5:12-13](#)). The competing Jewish “authorities” desired to gain followers for themselves while Paul desired them to follow Christ. As is typical in such political battles, Paul’s opponents accused Paul of the very wrong they were practicing.

This is why Paul urges rather than commands. He is seeking to point the Corinthians to follow Christ and walk in the Spirit.

He *urge(s)* by the *meekness and gentleness of Christ*.

Meekness in modern culture tends to evoke an image of conflict avoidance. We know this is not intended in the Bible, as the Greek word “praiotes” (**meekness**) is used in two verses where believers are exhorted to engage in confrontation. **Galatians 6:1** exhorts those who are spiritual to confront sinners with **meekness** (“praiotes”) so that they might not be tempted and also sin.

We can infer from this that **meekness** is seeking to understand the perspective of the other person, to speak to them in a manner where they can see what is true and receive benefit. The focus is upon seeking their good. The alternative would be to seek to dominate, condemn, or control (like the competing “authorities”). This is sin.

Likewise, in **2 Timothy 2:25**, Paul advises Timothy to instruct those “who are in opposition” to sound teaching “with gentleness [“praiotes”] correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”

Timothy must not avoid confrontation. He is to confront wrong with truth, something only the strong do. However, his confrontation is not to be for the purpose of domination or control. The purpose is to seek “repentance” and “knowledge of the truth.” So, again, “praiotes” is approaching a potentially contentious situation with an intent to benefit the other person and serve what is right and true.

To be meek in this manner is not a sign of weakness, but strength. Paul lists **meekness** “praiotes” as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**). It takes a person exceedingly strong in character to confront someone, risking rejection, in order to seek benefit for the other person by aligning them with what is true and right. Thus, the term **urge** connects with the term **meekness**. Paul is not coercing the Corinthians. Rather, he is presenting them with truth that they might make choices that lead to their greatest benefit.

Paul is asking the Corinthians to believe what is true about his apostleship and authority in the gospel. But he is also asking them to read, understand, and agree with his letter so that he does not have to dispute with them further when he sees them in person. When he visits in person, he desires to engage in constructive activities that result in shared ministry.

As we saw in **Galatians 5:23**, “praiotes” is sometimes translated as **gentleness** rather than **meekness**. But in this instance, another Greek word “epieikeia” is translated as **gentleness**.

“Epieikeia” is only used here and in **Acts 24:4** and carries with it the sense of gentle restraint. It is translated in **Acts 24:4** as “kindness” or “courtesy.” An orator named “Tertullus” uses “epieikeia” when addressing the governor Felix to accuse Paul. There, Tertullus asks Felix to please grant him some of his valuable time in order to consider his argument. Tertullus asked the authority (Felix, the governor)

for the courtesy of hearing his case. In that instance, it was the subordinate asking favor of the authority.

Paul reverses this here in 2 Corinthians. He is an authority, an apostle of Jesus Christ. He could exercise his authority with sternness and power. But he is, rather, exercising a gentle constraint, that they might hear and decide of their own accord, which is for their best.

Even though Paul will state strongly his defense against charges against his person and his ministry beginning in Chapter 11, he wants the Corinthians to know he is writing and coming in the spirit of Christ. *I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!* (v. 1b).

In saying this, Paul appears to be using tongue-in-cheek irony, most likely stating one of the charges against him in verse 1, namely that he is *meek when face to face but bold toward* them *in his letters*. The Greek word translated *meek* in this sentence is from the same Greek root word he previously used for *meekness*. This *meek* translates “tapeinos” which can also be translated as “lowly” or “base.” The idea is to contrast an unimpressive, perhaps even feeble in-person presence with a *bold* and impressive written presence.

Since Paul is likely repeating a criticism and twisting it into an irony, *meek* might be better translated as “lowly.” If stemming from a criticism, it would have been intended by detractors in a negative sense. We can take from this that Paul, as a brilliant scholar, might have been stereotypical in that sense, coming across *face to face* in person more like an introverted academic than a powerful orator. We can infer that Paul’s personal presence was unimpressive. This is something he came to embrace as a strength, because he realized he is perfected in weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

Paul’s request that *when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some* indicates Paul is planning a visit to Corinth. He does not want a repeat of the previous, painful visit. He is asking, pleading, urging, that the Corinthian believers would receive this letter, confront and confirm the facts, and get on the same page with him before he visits them in person.

Paul is hoping that he will not need to be as *bold with the confidence with which I propose to be*. He is giving them every opportunity to understand the facts and deal with things themselves. However, if there are those *who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh* (v. 2b), whose views remain ascendant, then when he comes, he will be bold and *courageous against some*. Although he greatly desires the church in Corinth to address their concerns themselves prior to his coming, if things are still awry when he gets to Corinth he will apply his apostolic authority to deal with them.

He will say something similar near the end of the letter, urging them to clean up the mess before he comes so that they can use their time together “building up” what is true and right rather than “tearing down” falsehoods and “fortresses.”

“For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

[\(2 Corinthians 13:10\)](#)

To walk [according to the flesh](#) would be to walk according to the world’s standards and values. If true, the accusation that Paul was using his authority primarily for self-benefit, including to line his own pocket, would be [according to the flesh](#) (certainly a common occurrence in the world’s system). Paul responds to this allegation, [For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh](#) (v. 3).

When Paul says [For though we walk in the flesh](#), he is merely saying that we live in a physical body while in this world. The word [flesh](#) translates the Greek word “sarx.” We can see that this term is used to refer to a physical body in many verses. An example is [Matthew 24:22](#), where Jesus says if God had not shortened the coming great tribulation then no “life [‘sarx’] would be saved.”

But it is the physical body (“sarx”) that houses the sinful nature. Paul describes this in [Romans 7:18, 21-23](#). He also describes this reality in [Galatians 5](#), urging “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” ([Galatians 5:16](#)). The “flesh” here is the physical body. The “desire of the flesh” is the sinful nature we are born with due to the Fall.

Accordingly, Paul uses the term “sarx” to refer both to a physical body, as in verse 3, as well as to the characteristics native to our physical bodies, which includes the sinful nature, as in verse 2. We can tell which is being referred to by the context.

Here, Paul is declaring that we live in this world in a physical body, but [we do not war according to the flesh](#). In saying [we do not war according to the flesh](#), Paul seems to mean “This is not a physical battle but a spiritual one.” He could also be saying “I am not going to use fleshly means of combatting this attack against me.” He probably means both.

Paul will not go tit for tat. He recognizes that his true enemy is Satan rather than people ([Ephesians 6:12](#)). He is going to follow his own teaching, recognizing that warring in a fleshly manner is self-destructive, dividing us from God’s good design for us, which is to serve and live in harmony with others. We can see the counterproductive and self-destructive outcomes of fleshly behavior in Paul’s listing in [Galatians 5:19-21](#). The antidote for the poison of sin and the flesh is the Spirit. It is God’s [divinely powerful](#) truth that destroys [fortresses](#) of falsehood.

The we here in the phrase we do not war according to the flesh likely refers to Paul and all who join him in walking in the Spirit rather than the flesh. Paul is urging the Corinthians to be among that number. Paul continues the thought that we do not war according to the flesh, adding for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses (v. 4).

Paul acknowledges that this dispute with these competing Jewish “authorities” is a version of warfare. But this is not a physical battle, according to the flesh. The true contest is a battle for the mind. It is a contest for the souls/lives of the Corinthian believers. Paul will say later of his adversaries—the competing Jewish “authorities”—that they are striving to lead the Corinthians into falsehood, and in doing so are serving Satan:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

(2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

These false apostles are doing the deeds of Satan, spreading darkness. This is, indeed, war. But it is not a physical war. This is not a war fought with clubs. It is not a war where one group of physical bodies is trying to inflict physical death on another group of bodies. It is a much greater battle! It is a spiritual war over whether these believers will walk in the Spirit (that leads to consequences of life) or the flesh (which leads to consequences of death).

It is a war where Paul’s battle objective is the destruction of fortresses.

Paul now describes the spiritual fortresses:

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God (v. 5a).

A “fortress” is an obstacle that prevents passage. We can picture a wall around a city. The wall’s purpose is to prevent passage. A fortress creates a path of least resistance into the city: the gate.

Spiritual fortresses are wrong ways of thinking. They are speculations or opinions rather than truth. The speculations become an obstacle that prevents truth from passing into the mind. In this case it does not appear there is a gate. To gain passage for truth the wall must be destroyed.

Paul's desire is to destroy the high wall of speculations altogether. He desires there to be no obstacle to truth; truth should have free passage into the mind. We can infer from this the observable reality that false mental models/perspectives stand in the way of us seeing what is true.

The Greek word translated speculations also appears in Romans 2:15 where it is translated "thoughts." The particular thoughts Paul wants to destroy in spiritual warfare are every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. The Greek word translated lofty can also be rendered "high." This fits with the idea of a high-walled fortress. The higher the wall, the greater the obstacle to passage. The reason for knocking down the fortresses is to allow free passage of the knowledge of God.

The Apostle Peter also uses the term "knowledge of God" in his second letter. He says there that part of the "knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" is knowing that "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:2-3). This infers that the fortresses that are raised up against the knowledge of God would bring death and ungodliness.

Death is separation. In physical death, the human spirit separates from the body (James 2:26). Sin separates us from God's good design, for us to live in service and harmony with one another. When we walk in the Spirit, we love our neighbors and when we walk in the flesh we bite and devour them (Galatians 5:14-15). To walk in our design is to walk in life and to walk apart from our design separates us from life (and is therefore a kind of death).

To destroy fortresses built in our minds that prevent passage of the truth is to replace darkness in our minds with light. And the knowledge of God leads to life and godliness. Paul's intent to wage this war against fortresses in our minds is through use of the weapons of our warfare that are divinely powerful (v. 4).

It appears that the means of destroying speculations and every lofty thing and seeing the destruction of fortresses and strongholds of the enemy is the same for any category of falsehood. Paul gives us his battle plan: we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (v. 5b). Any operation of war requires weapons.

This infers that the spiritual weapons Paul will use revolve around truth, facts. To take a thought captive to the obedience of Christ is to capture any thought and align it with what is true. In Ephesians 6, Paul tells believers that their daily routine should include preparing for spiritual battle. Most of the preparation is defensive. The offensive weapon Paul urges us to use is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

The “sword” is a hand-to-hand weapon. Since Paul is thinking here of destroying [fortresses](#) we might imagine we could substitute “battering ram, which is the word of God” to adapt the metaphor of [Ephesians 6](#) to that of [2 Corinthians 10](#). We might also imagine that since Paul shifts to language like “taking [captive](#)” in his war metaphor, that the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” might also be used to capture and imprison false beliefs. In each case the enemy is falsehood, and the means of defeating falsehood is truth, since God’s word is truth ([John 17:17](#)).

As we have seen, context indicates that [speculations](#) are untrue thoughts or beliefs. The untrue thoughts we see Paul battling against in this letter fit into two categories: 1) [speculations](#) concerning the gospel of grace that Paul has preached to them and 2) [speculations](#) or arguments that have been given against Paul, his character, his ministry, and his apostolic integrity.

The [speculations](#) concerning the gospel of grace are answered through [taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ](#). This would involve aligning any [thought](#) to the truth of God and rejecting any thought that does not align with His truth. Similarly, the [speculations](#) concerning Paul’s apostolic authority are also taken care of through [taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ](#). Again, what is true should be accepted and what is false rejected. But the focus is not to secure obedience to Paul, or anyone else. The focus is to secure [the obedience of Christ](#).

We will see in [2 Corinthians 11:23-31](#) that Paul will set forth a résumé of suffering that makes a compelling fact—case that he has lived his life fully obedient to Christ and in service of the gospel. Chapter 10 and the first part of Chapter 11 lead up to this fact—case.

We will also see that his opponents, the competing Jewish “authorities,” are countering his gospel of grace. Speaking of the “false apostles” ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#)), Paul says:

“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.”

[\(2 Corinthians 11:20\)](#)

The inference is that the competing Jewish “authorities” are seeking to place the Corinthians under their control, likely through legalism, and in doing so extract benefit from them, possibly including financial benefit. The phrase “hits you in the face” would indicate a severe measure of control. Conversely, Paul desires them to live freely in Christ rather than be enslaved by men ([2 Corinthians 3:17](#), [Galatians 5:13](#)). The gospel of grace sets us free from sin and the Law ([Romans 8:2](#)).

We can explore how to take [every thought captive to the obedience of Christ](#) by first exploring the word [thought](#). This word appears in five verses in 2 Corinthians:

- In [2 Corinthians 2:11](#), the Greek word translated *thought* is rendered “schemes” and refers to the mind or thoughts of Satan.
- In [2 Corinthians 3:14](#), the Greek word translated *thought* is rendered “mind” and refers to the hardened minds of unbelieving Jews.
- In [2 Corinthians 4:4](#), the Greek word translated *thought* is rendered “minds” and refers to unbelievers who have had their minds blinded by Satan.
- Here in [2 Corinthians 10:5](#), we see *thought* referring to every thought of our mind being actively captured by and made submissive to the obedience of Christ.
- In [2 Corinthians 11:3](#), the Greek word translated *thought* is rendered “minds” and refers to the minds of the Corinthian believers. Paul expresses concern that they have been deceived, as Eve was deceived, and are following a false gospel.

We can see that Satan has “schemes” that corrupt the mind with the goal of stealing the freedom of a believer and placing them into captivity. We know believers can do the will of Satan and still be children of God. We saw this with the Apostle Peter. Just after Jesus pronounced him blessed of God for having the truth of His identity revealed to him, Jesus spoke to Peter, saying “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” ([Matthew 16:23](#)).

We see in this episode with Jesus and Peter that we can know the truth and still have our minds on man’s interests rather than God’s. This shows the appropriateness of Paul’s metaphor that gaining the truth requires ongoing, strenuous effort to battle against the devil’s schemes and take *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*.

The word *every* emphasizes that until *every thought* is held *captive to the obedience of Christ* we remain at risk to fall into the schemes of the enemy of our souls. This would urge us to be continually diligent in seeking to take *every thought captive*, not just some thoughts, but *every thought*.

The *obedience of Christ* would mean following the commands of Jesus. Jesus’s crowning command was a new one: to love one another as He loved us ([John 13:34](#)). To love one’s neighbor is a pillar of the Old Testament Law ([Leviticus 19:18](#), [Matthew 22:37-39](#)). To love as Jesus loved is to give our lives in service, an exceedingly higher standard of love.

- To take a *thought captive to the obedience of Christ* would include rejecting a thought that “I should pay this person back with bitterness” and choose rather to forgive ([Matthew 6:14](#)). This would pave the way to love others.

- To take a *thought captive to the obedience of Christ* would include rejecting a thought of temptation, as Jesus rejected, and obeying His will for us to be sanctified ([1 Thessalonians 4:3](#)). To reject sexual temptation is to reject exploiting others for our own pleasure and paves the way to love others.

To *take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ* is to supplant all self-seeking thoughts and replace them with thoughts that seek to love others as Christ loved us. If we *take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ* we should have the mind of Christ.

Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ” ([1 Corinthians 2:16](#)). That we have the “mind of Christ” tells us that we have the truth within us because we are in Christ. The Spirit is connected with our mind and will lead us into all truth if we choose it. To choose the truth and reject what is false, then to act upon what is true, is to take *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*.

But our old nature is also connected to our mind. Thus, we have an internal battle between the flesh, which desires to lead us into what is false, and the mind of the Lord which desires to lead us into truth. We have a will that evaluates and chooses. Paul exhorts us to choose to follow the Spirit rather than the flesh ([Galatians 5:16-17](#)).

This is why Paul will assert at the end of this letter “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you— unless indeed you fail the test?” ([2 Corinthians 13:5](#)). Paul tests himself. In [1 Corinthians 4:4-5](#), he asserts that he has tested himself and has a clear conscience. But he also emphasizes that it will be God who judges, not him (nor anyone else).

In Romans, Paul wrote,

“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”

([Romans 8:6-7](#))

A mind captured by God will result in obedience to Christ. A mind set on the flesh leads to death ([James 1:15](#)). Death is separation; for example, physical death is a human spirit separating from a body ([James 2:26](#)). A mind set on the flesh separates us from walking in God’s good design. It leads to addiction and loss of mental health ([Romans 1:26](#), [28](#)).

In [Ephesians 6:11](#), Paul instructed believers to “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”

This is the same basic idea. Putting on armor is something a Roman centurion would do daily, prior to showing up for work. Paul further stated, “in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” ([Ephesians 6:16](#)).

The picture that emerges is that we, as believers in Jesus:

- Are a new creation in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#))
- With the mind of Christ ([1 Corinthians 2:16](#))
- With the Spirit of Christ ([2 Corinthians 3:3](#))
- And accordingly are equipped to *take every thought captive* and walk in the *obedience of Christ*.

But we also have:

- A sin nature with a fleshly bent ([2 Corinthians 7:1](#))
- A need for *every thought* to be taken captive *to the obedience of Christ* on a daily basis.
- A need to continually examine ourselves, comparing our thoughts to scripture and the leading of the Spirit to ensure all *fortresses* are being leveled by the truth of the knowledge of God.

When Jesus was praying just before His arrest and crucifixion, He prayed for His disciples and said, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” ([John 17:16](#)) This is Paul’s thought here, that while we are in the world *we walk in the flesh*, meaning we are physical beings in a physical world. At the same time, we are not of the world, because our true citizenship is in heaven ([Philippians 3:20](#)).

This is why our greatest battle is not a *war according to the flesh*. The greatest battle is in the spiritual realm. *The weapons of our warfare* are not the weapons that the world uses. He has said earlier in the letter that our weapons are “the weapons of righteousness” ([2 Corinthians 6:7](#)).

Paul gives a vivid description of these weapons in his letter to the Ephesians,

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

([Ephesians 6:11-14](#))

He goes on in that chapter to describe the armor and weaponry ([Ephesians 6:14-17](#)).

The power in the phrase *divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses* is power from God. In [2 Corinthians 4:7](#), Paul speaks of the “power” from “God and not of ourselves” being housed in our bodies, which he calls “this treasure in earthen vessels.”

Paul believes, preaches, and teaches that we are dependent on the Spirit to live in a manner that is *divinely powerful*. We cannot accomplish this in any manner by our ability or station or place in the world. It is the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, who through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead triumphed over sin and death.

Paul completes the sentence that began in verse 5, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” by adding *and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete* (v. 6).

Paul is hoping that his letter to the Corinthian believers will be instructive from them to come to the place of *obedience to Christ*. He has already received the information from Titus of the repentance of many of the Corinthians concerning Paul and his apostleship ([2 Corinthians 7:9](#)). He implored the Corinthians to set all things right prior to his next visit ([2 Corinthians 10:1-2](#)).

He now appears to be asking the Corinthians to take another step and confront the continuing agitation from his enemies against his apostolic authority to pull them away from freedom in Christ and place them under their sway ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#), [19-20](#)).

We would naturally expect the phrase *we are ready to punish all disobedience* to apply to a looming confrontation. But Paul qualifies this by saying: *whenever your obedience is complete*. The Greek word translated *complete* carries the notion of being filled to the brim. We recall that at the beginning of this chapter, Paul said, “Please take care of all this before I come in person.” Then he said, “I will deal with it if you won’t.” Now he seems to be saying, “I will see the extent to which you obey the commands of Christ, and I will *punish all disobedience* that remains.”

He does not explain what the punishment (*punish all* disobedience) will be. Under his apostolic authority it could include excommunication from the church. This is what he prescribed in 1 Corinthians for the church member openly practicing sexual sin ([1 Corinthians 1:1](#), [5](#), [7](#)).

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You can access the original article here: [2 Corinthians 10:1-6 Meaning](#)

Some scholars believe that Chapters 10 through 13 are actually a second epistle and Chapters 1 through 9 are a third epistle. Certainly, there seems to be much in these next chapters to make the Corinthians sad ([chapter 2:2](#)); and they don't seem to follow the tone or content of the preceding chapters.

[v. 1](#) Apparently, some of the Corinthians who disliked Paul had ridiculed his appearance. "Presence" also means "outward appearance"

[v. 2](#) It seems that one man in the church in Corinth criticized Paul and had gathered a small group around himself. He seemed to use everything against Paul—from his appearance to the collection for the church in Jerusalem. One of the accusations against Paul was that he was guided by his flesh and not by the Spirit ([Chapter 1:17](#)).

[v. 3-4](#) Paul's methods of defense were not carnal but spiritual.

[v. 5](#) We need to ask the Holy Spirit for help in controlling our imagination and thoughts.

[v. 8](#) Paul didn't want to tear the people down with his authority but to build them up.

[v. 15](#) Paul had taken the Gospel to the Corinthians, but another man was building on the foundation Paul had laid. There are always those who come into an established work and try to draw people after themselves. This man in Corinth was trying to build himself up by tearing Paul down.

[v. 17-18](#) Some people take unto themselves the glory due to God for His works through them.

Matthew Henry Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10

Chapter 10

There was no place in which the apostle Paul met with more opposition from false apostles than at Corinth; he had many enemies there. Let not any of the ministers of Christ think it strange if they meet with perils, not only from enemies, but from false brethren; for blessed Paul himself did so. Though he was so blameless and inoffensive in all his carriage, so condescending and useful to all, yet there were those who bore him ill-will, who envied him, and did all they could to undermine him, and lessen his interest and reputation. Therefore he vindicates himself from their imputation, and arms the Corinthians against their insinuations. In this chapter the apostle, in a mild and humble manner, asserts the power of his preaching, and to punish offenders ([v. 1-6](#)). He then proceeds to reason the case with the Corinthians, asserting his relation to Christ, and his authority as an apostle of Christ ([v. 7-11](#)), and refuses to justify himself, or to act by such rules as the false teachers did, but according to the better rules he had fixed for himself ([v. 12-18](#)).

[2Cr 10:1-6](#)

Here we may observe,

- I. The mild and humble manner in which the blessed apostle addresses the Corinthians, and how desirous he is that no occasion may be given him to use severity.
 - 1. He addresses them in a very mild and humble manner: *[I Paul myself beseech you, v. 1]*. We find, in the introduction to this epistle, he joined Timothy with himself; but now he speaks only for himself, against whom the false apostles had particularly levelled their reproaches; yet in the midst of the greatest provocations he shows humility and mildness, from the consideration of the *[meekness and gentleness of Christ]*, and desires this great example may have the same influence on the Corinthians. Note, When we find ourselves tempted or inclined to be rough and severe towards any body, we should think of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that appeared in him in the days of his flesh, in the design of his undertaking, and in all the acts of his grace towards poor souls. How humbly also does this great apostle speak of himself, as *[one in presence base among them]*. So his enemies spoke of him with contempt, and he seems to acknowledge it; while others thought meanly, and spoke scornfully of him, he had low thoughts of himself, and spoke humbly of himself. Note, We should be sensible of our own infirmities, and think humbly of ourselves, even when men reproach us for them.
 - 2. He is desirous that no occasion may be given to use severity, *[v. 2]*. *[He beseeches them]* to give no occasion for him to be bold, or to exercise his authority against them in general, as he had resolved to do against some who unjustly charged him as *[walking according to the flesh]*, that is, regulating his conduct, even in his ministerial actions, according to carnal policy or with worldly views. This was what the apostle had renounced, and this is contrary to the spirit and design of the gospel, and was far from being the aim and design of the apostle. Hereupon,
- II. He asserts the power of his preaching and his power to punish offenders.
 - 1. The power of his preaching, *[v. 3, 5]*. Here observe,
 - (1.) The work of the ministry is a warfare, not *[after the flesh]* indeed, for it is a spiritual warfare, with spiritual enemies and for spiritual purposes. And though ministers walk in the flesh, or live in the body, and in the common affairs of life act as other men, yet in their work and warfare they must not go by the maxims of the flesh, nor should they design to please the flesh: this must be crucified with its affections and lusts; it must be mortified and kept under.
 - (2.) The doctrines of the gospel and discipline of the church are the weapons of this warfare; and these are not carnal: outward force, therefore, is not the method of the gospel, but strong persuasions, by the power of truth and the meekness of wisdom. A good argument this is against persecution for conscience' sake: conscience is accountable to God only; and people must be persuaded to God and their duty, not driven by force of arms. And so the weapons of our warfare are mighty, or very powerful; the evidence of truth is convincing and cogent. This indeed is through God, or owing to him, because they are his institutions, and accompanied with his blessing, which makes all opposition to fall before his victorious gospel. We may here observe,

- [1.] What opposition is made against the gospel by the powers of sin and Satan in the hearts of men. Ignorance, prejudices, beloved lusts, are Satan's strong-holds in the souls of some; vain imaginations, carnal reasonings, and high thoughts, or proud conceits, in others, exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, that is, by these ways the devil endeavours to keep men from faith and obedience to the gospel, and secures his possession of the hearts of men, as his own house or property. But then observe,
- [2.] The conquest which the word of God gains. These strong-holds are pulled down by the gospel as the means, through the grace and power of God accompanying it as the principal efficient cause. Note, The conversion of the soul is the conquest of Satan in that soul.
- 2. The apostle's power to punish offenders (and that in an extraordinary manner) is asserted in v. 6. The apostle was a prime-minister in the kingdom of Christ, and chief officer in his army, and had in readiness (that is, he had power and authority at hand) to revenge all disobedience, or to punish offenders in a most exemplary and extraordinary manner. The apostle speaks not of personal revenge, but of punishing disobedience to the gospel, and disorderly walking among church-members, by inflicting church-censures. Note, Though the apostle showed meekness and gentleness, yet he would not betray his authority; and therefore intimates that when he would commend those whose obedience was fulfilled or manifested others would fall under severe censures.

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10

The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians

Commentary by A. R. FAUSSET

CHAPTER 10

2Cr 10:1-18. HE VINDICATES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AGAINST THOSE WHO DEPRECIATED HIM FOR HIS PERSONAL APPEARANCE. HE WILL MAKE HIS POWER FELT WHEN HE COMES. HE BOASTS NOT, AS THEY, BEYOND HIS MEASURE.

1. I Paul myself--no longer "we," "us," "our" (2Cr 9:11): I who am represented by depreciators as "base," I, the same Paul, of my own accord "beseech you"; or rather "entreat," "exhort" you for your sake. As "I beseech you" (a distinct Greek verb, 2Cr 10:2) for my sake.

by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--He mentions these graces of Christ especially (Psa 18:35 Mat 11:29), as on account of his imitation of them in particular he was despised [GROTIUS]. He entreats them by these, in order to show that though he must have recourse to more

severe measures, he is naturally inclined to gentle ones after Christ's example [MENOCHIUS]. "Meekness" is more in the mind internally; "gentleness" in the external behavior, and in relation to others; for instance, the condescending yieldingness of a superior to an inferior, the former not insisting on his strict rights [TRENCH]. BENGEL explains it, "By the meekness and gentleness derived by me from Christ," not from my own nature: he objects to understanding it of Christ's meekness and gentleness, since nowhere else is "gentleness" attributed to Him. But though the exact Greek word is not applied to Him, the idea expressed by it is (compare Isa 40:11 Mat 12:19, 20).

in presence--in personal appearance when present with you.

base--Greek, "lowly"; timid, humbly diffident: opposed to "bold." "Am" stands here by ironical concession for "am reputed to be" (compare 2Cr 10:10).

2. I beseech you--Intimating that, as he can beseech in letters, so he can be severe in their presence.

that I may not be--that I may not have to be bold, &c.

with that confidence--that authoritative sternness.

I think--I am minded to be.

as if we walked according to the flesh--His Corinthian detractors judged of him by themselves, as if he were influenced by fleshly motives, the desire of favor or fear of giving offense, so as not to exercise his authority when present.

3. For--Reason why they should regard him "beseeching" them (2Cr 10:2) not to oblige him to have recourse to "bold" and stern exercise of authority. "We walk IN the flesh," and so in weakness; but not "ACCORDING TO the flesh" (2Cr 10:2). Moreover, though we WALK in it, we do not WAR according to it. A double contrast or antithesis. "They who accuse us of walking after the flesh, shall find [to their cost] that we do not war after the flesh; therefore compel us not to use our weapons" [ALFORD].

4. A confutation of those who try to propagate their creed by force and persecution (compare Luk 9:54-56).

weapons--for punishing offending members (2Cr 10:6 1Cr 4:21 5:5, 13); boldness of speech, ecclesiastical discipline (2Cr 10:8 2Cr 13:10), the power of the word, and of the sacraments, the various extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

carnal--Translate, "fleshly," to preserve the allusion to 2Cr 10:2, 3.

mighty through God--Greek, "mighty to God," that is, mighty before God: not humanly, but divinely powerful. The power is not ours, but God's. Compare "fair to God," that is, divinely fair (Act 7:20, Margin). Also above (2Cr 2:15), "unto God a sweet savor." "The efficacy of the Christian religion proves its truth" [BENGEL].

pulling down--As the Greek is the same as in 2Cr 10:5, translate, "casting down." Compare Jer 1:10 : the inspired servants of God inherit the commission of the Old Testament prophets.

strongholds-- ([Pro 21:22](#)); namely, in which sinners entrench themselves against reproof; all that opposes itself to Christ; the learning, and eloquence, and philosophical subtleties on which the Corinthians prided themselves. So Joshua's trumpet blast was "mighty" under God to overthrow the walls of Jericho.

5. imaginations--rather, "reasonings." Whereas "thought" expresses men's own [purpose](#) and determination of living after their own pleasure [TITTMANN].

high thing--So it ought to be translated ([Rom 8:39](#)). A distinct [Greek](#) word from that in [Eph 3:18](#), "height," and [Rev 21:16](#), which belongs to God and heaven from whence we receive nothing hurtful. But "high thing" is not so much "height" as [something made high](#), and belongs to those regions of air where the powers of darkness ::exalt themselves" against Christ and us ([Eph 2:2](#) [6:12](#) [2Th 2:4](#)).

exalteth itself-- [2Th 2:4](#) supports [English Version](#) rather than the translation of ELLICOTT, &c., "is lifted up." Such were the [high towers](#) of Judaic self-righteousness, philosophic speculations, and rhetorical sophistries, the "knowledge" so much prized by many (opposed to "the knowledge of God"), which endangered a section of the Corinthian Church.

against the knowledge of God--True knowledge makes men humble. Where there is exaltation of self, there knowledge of God is wanting [BENGEL]. Arrange the words following thus: "Bringing every thought (that is, [intent of the mind or will](#)) into captivity to the obedience of Christ," that is, to obey Christ. The three steps of the apostle's spiritual warfare are: (1) It demolishes what is opposed to Christ; (2) It leads captive; (3) It brings into obedience to Christ ([Rom 1:5](#) [16:26](#)). The "reasonings" ([English Version](#), "imaginations") are utterly "cast down." The "mental intents" ([English Version](#), "thoughts") are taken willing captives, and tender the voluntary obedience of faith to Christ the Conqueror.

6. Translate, "Having ourselves (that is, [being](#)) in readiness to exact punishment for all disobedience," &c. We have this in store for the disobedient: it will be brought into action in due time.

when your obedience, &c.--He charitably assumes that most of the Corinthian Church will act obediently; therefore he says "YOUR obedience." But perhaps some will act otherwise; in order, therefore, to give all an opportunity of joining the obedient, he will not prematurely exact punishment, but wait until the full number of those gathered out to Christ has been "completed," and the remainder have been proved incorrigible. He had acted already so at Corinth ([Act 18:6-11](#); compare [Exd 32:34](#) [Mat 13:28-30](#)).

David Guzik

Study Guide for 2 Corinthians 10

HOW TO JUDGE AN APOSTLE

A. Does Paul walk according to the flesh?

1. (2 Corinthians 10:1) Paul pleads with the Corinthians.

Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ — who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.

a. **Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you:** Paul introduces this chapter with a change of tone. Some have even thought that 2 Corinthians 10 through 13 really make up a different letter that was added to the end of 2 Corinthians 1 through 9. This isn't likely, but it does show that Paul is changing gears as he ends the letter.

i. "Having now finished his directions and advices relative to the collection for the poor, he resumes his argument relative to the false apostle, who had gained considerable influence by representing St. Paul as despicable in his person, his ministry, and his influence." (Clarke)

b. **Pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ:** In these next few chapters, Paul will get a little "rough" with the Corinthian Christians. Yet he does it all in **the meekness and gentleness of Christ**.

c. **Who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you:** Here, Paul reveals a matter of great contention between him and the Corinthian Christians. They said that Paul seemed reserved in person but very bold in his letters.

i. The Corinthians criticized Paul as if he were a dog that barked loudly, but only at a distance. They accused him of backing down in any face-to-face confrontation.

d. **Who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you:** How can the same person be **in presence lowly** and **bold toward you** at other times? Isn't this contradictory? It isn't a contradiction at all. Those who can't see that boldness and lowliness can be found in the same person don't know the life of Jesus very well.

2. (2 Corinthians 10:2) Paul hopes that the Corinthians will change their attitude towards him and his credentials as an apostle so that he may come to them in gentleness, not severity.

But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

a. **I intend to be bold against some:** **Some** reminds us that we shouldn't think that all the Corinthian Christians had a bad opinion of Paul. It may have been merely a vocal minority.

b. **Who think of us as if walked according to the flesh**: This is another aspect of the accusations made against Paul by some of the Corinthian Christians. They said he was a man who **walked according to the flesh**.

i. He is accused of this because of the perceived contradiction between his gentleness and his severity.

c. In the following section, Paul will defend his apostolic authority. It is important to see how vital Paul's sense of apostolic authority was to him. Today, the idea of apostolic authority is cheapened by many of those who claim to be "apostles."

3. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) Does Paul minister according to the flesh?

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

a. **For though we walk in the flesh**: Paul will admit that he walks according to the flesh in the sense that we all do. He is a flesh and blood human being, and he struggles with the same things the Corinthian Christians struggled with. However, Paul wants to make it clear that he does not **war according to the flesh**.

b. **For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal**: When Paul fought, his weapons were not material but spiritual, suited for spiritual war.

i. The **carnal** weapons Paul refuses were not material weapons such as swords and spears. The **carnal** weapons he renounced were the manipulative and deceitful ways his opponents used. Paul would not defend his apostolic credentials with **carnal** weapons others used.

ii. In [Ephesians 6](#), Paul lists the spiritual weapons he used: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. To rely on these weapons took faith in God instead of **carnal** methods. But truly, these weapons are **mighty in God for pulling down strongholds**.

iii. The Corinthian Christians tended to rely on and admire **carnal** weapons for the Christian battle:

- Instead of the belt of truth, they fought with manipulation.
- Instead of the breastplate of righteousness, they fought with the image of success.
- Instead of the shoes of the gospel, they fought with smooth words.
- Instead of the shield of faith, they fought with the perception of power.

- Instead of the helmet of salvation, they fought with lording over authority.
- Instead of the sword of the Spirit, they fought with human schemes and programs.

iv. Jesus relied on spiritual weapons when He fought for our salvation. [Philippians 2:6-8](#) describes this: *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* This kind of victory through humble obedience offended the Corinthian Christians because it seemed so “weak.” The carnal, human way is to overpower, dominate, manipulate, and out-maneuver. The spiritual, Jesus way is to humble yourself, die to yourself, and let God show His resurrection power through you.

v. “Apart from a mighty awakening and revival in the church, we are fighting a losing battle because we are resisting on carnal levels.” (Redpath)

vi. Our spiritual weapons are scorned by the world but feared by demonic powers. When we fight with true spiritual weapons, then no principality or power can stand against us. “As the spittle that comes out of a man’s mouth slayeth serpents, so doth that which proceedeth out of the mouths of God’s faithful ministers quell and kill evil imaginations, carnal reasonings, which are the legion of domestic devils, that hold near intelligence with the old serpent.” (John Trapp)

c. **Pulling down strongholds:** **Strongholds** in this context are wrong thoughts and perceptions, contradicting the true knowledge of God and the nature of God. These **strongholds** are expressed in **arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.**

- This reliance on carnal methods and the habit of carnal thinking is a true stronghold. It stubbornly sets down deep roots in the heart and mind, and it colors all of our actions and thinking. It is hard to let go of the thinking that values the things and ways of this world, but God’s power really can break down these **strongholds**.
- In Paul’s native land of Cilicia, some fifty years before he was born, Roman armies destroyed many rocky fortresses to defeat the pirates who had taken refuge in those strongholds. Perhaps Paul saw the ruins and thought of the battle needed to conquer those fortresses.
- Redpath writes of a practical way to battle with spiritual weapons and break down a stronghold: “When the thought comes and the person is reported to have said what he has said, and the unkindness has been passed over to us, and the criticism has been made,

whereas carnality would say, 'Counterattack!' spirituality recognizes that nothing that any person could ever say about any one is really one hundredth part as bad as the truth if he only knew it. Therefore, we have no reason to counterattack, but one good reason to submit and to forget."

iv. Praise God, **strongholds** can be pulled down! Clarke recounts with wonder one stronghold pulled down in history: "In like manner the doctrines of the **reformation**, mighty through God, **pulled down** — demolished and **brought into captivity**, the whole papal system; and instead of **obedience to the pope**, the pretended vicar of God upon the earth, **obedience to Christ**, as the sole almighty Head of the Church, was established, particularly in Great Britain, where it continues to prevail. Hallelujah! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!" (Adam Clarke)

d. **Arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God**: Carnal and worldly ways of thinking and doing are **arguments** against the mind and methods of God. They want to debate God, saying they have a better way. They exalt themselves **against the knowledge of God**. They think of themselves as smarter, more sophisticated, more effective, more powerful than God's ways. Carnal, worldly minds think they know more than God does!

i. We must remind ourselves that Paul speaks to carnal, worldly thinking **among Christians**. He isn't talking about the world here but the Corinthian Christians. They were the ones with the **strongholds** in their minds and hearts. They made the **arguments** against God's mind and methods. They held on to **every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God**. We miss it entirely if we think the love of manipulation, the image of success, smooth words, the perception of power, lording over authority, and human schemes and programs are just problems among unbelievers. Paul dealt with this heart and mind in the church.

ii. "For nothing is more opposed to the spiritual wisdom of God than the wisdom of the flesh, and nothing more opposed to His grace than man's natural ability." (Calvin)

e. **Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ**: To battle against this carnal way of thinking and doing, our **thoughts** must be **brought captive** and made obedient to Jesus.

i. When we start to think in this carnal way, we must stop our thoughts, take dominion over them in Jesus, and **not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** ([Romans 12:2](#))

ii. Paul's first application is towards the carnal, worldly thinking of the Corinthian Christians that made them despise Paul and his "weakness," doubting his apostolic credentials. But Paul's principle has a much broader application. We are not helpless victims or recipients of our thoughts. We can choose to stop our thoughts and bring **every thought into captivity to**

the obedience of Christ. Thoughts of lust, thoughts of anger, thoughts of fear, thoughts of greed, bitter thoughts, evil thoughts — they are part of **every thought** that may be and must be brought **into captivity to the obedience of Christ**.

iii. Someone might object: “I don’t want my thoughts to be captive to anyone. I don’t want my thoughts to be captive to Jesus. I want my thoughts to be free.” This is wrong on at least two points. First, you belong to **someone**, and ultimately we either serve Jesus or Satan. Second, if you are a Christian, you are a **purchased possession of Jesus Christ**. You belong to Him. ¹ **Corinthians 6:19-20** puts it this way: *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

f. **And being ready to punish all disobedience**: Paul was ready to confront the Corinthian Christians and to pull down the strongholds among them if they would not do it themselves.

i. Many commentators think the phrase **to punish all disobedience** is taken from the Roman military court. Paul says, “We are all soldiers together in this battle, and I am ready to bring in some discipline among these troops.”

ii. **When your obedience is fulfilled**: Paul sees no point in coming to confront disobedience until those who have obeyed Jesus have made up their mind to do so. He will give time for those who want to renounce carnal weapons to do so. Then he will come to punish the disobedience of those who will not renounce those carnal weapons.

iii. “Herein the apostle hath set a rule and a pattern to all churches, where are multitudes that walk disorderly; not to be too hasty in excommunicating them, but to proceed gradually; first using all fair means, and waiting with all patience, for the reducing them to their duty, who will by any gentle and fair means be reduced; and then revenging the honour and glory of God only upon such as will not be reclaimed.” (Poole)

When AI Becomes The Pastor: Christians Turning To Algorithms For Spiritual Truth



BY PNW STAFF MAY 11, 2026

The rise of artificial intelligence was supposed to change how we work, shop, search and communicate. Few imagined it would also begin reshaping how young people pray, seek wisdom and understand God. Yet that is exactly where society now finds itself.

A growing number of young Christians are no longer just using AI to summarize homework assignments or generate social media captions -- they are turning to it for spiritual counsel, moral guidance and even emotional reassurance once sought from pastors, parents or Scripture itself.

And the numbers are startling.

New research from the Barna Group found that nearly one-third of practicing Christians believe spiritual advice from AI is as trustworthy as advice from a pastor. Among Gen Z and Millennials, that number climbs to roughly 40%. The study also found that four in ten Christians say AI has already helped them with prayer, Bible study or spiritual growth.

This is more than a technology story. It is a spiritual and cultural warning sign.

Artificial intelligence can be useful for organizing information or quickly finding Bible verses. But there is a dangerous difference between using AI as a tool and treating it as a spiritual authority. Many young people are beginning to blur that line.

The greatest danger is that AI sounds confident even when it is wrong. Chatbots present answers instantly, smoothly and persuasively. For younger users raised in a digital world, confidence often feels like truth. But AI systems do not possess wisdom, discernment, conviction or spiritual maturity. They are predictive algorithms trained on enormous amounts of internet data -- including biased information, contradictory theology, false teachings and outright misinformation.

In other words, AI does not "know" God. It predicts what a human might want to hear about God.

That distinction matters enormously.

Researchers studying AI and spirituality have warned that modern AI systems are not worldview-neutral. One recent academic paper examining AI and Christianity found that many systems default toward what researchers called "procedural secularism," producing answers that often lack theological coherence and drift away from historic Christian teaching.

This creates a subtle but serious spiritual problem. AI often adapts itself to the user. If someone wants affirmation, the algorithm tends to provide affirmation. If someone wants progressive theology, legalism, universalism or moral compromise, the AI can often generate responses that reinforce those preferences. Instead of challenging the heart, it mirrors it.

That is not discipleship. That is digital self-confirmation.

Historically, spiritual growth required accountability, correction, community and wisdom passed through real relationships. Pastors, mentors and mature believers could recognize emotional struggles, spiritual confusion or destructive thinking patterns. AI cannot truly do that. It can simulate empathy, but simulation is not the same as discernment.

Even more concerning is how emotionally attached some young users are becoming to AI systems. Around the world, researchers are increasingly studying how people form emotional dependence on conversational AI tools. For lonely or spiritually searching young people, an always-available chatbot can become a substitute for authentic Christian fellowship. Unlike a pastor, mentor or trusted friend, AI never gets tired, never disagrees too strongly and never truly knows the user beyond data patterns.

That convenience can become spiritually corrosive.

There is also the issue of algorithmic bias. AI models are trained primarily on internet content, media narratives and dominant cultural assumptions. Those assumptions frequently lean secular, politically progressive or morally relative. Over time, repeated exposure to those frameworks can slowly shape the spiritual thinking of young believers without them even realizing it.

The danger is rarely immediate apostasy. It is gradual drift.

A young Christian asks an AI about sexuality, suffering, judgment, salvation or sin. The answer sounds compassionate, modern and intelligent. But beneath the polished language may be subtle distortions of biblical truth. Because the answer arrived instantly and sounded authoritative, it carries emotional weight. Multiply that process thousands of times across millions of young users, and churches may eventually face a generation disciplined more by algorithms than Scripture.

Ironically, even many pastors admit uncertainty about how to respond. The Barna research found that while many Christians want guidance about AI from church leaders, only a small percentage of pastors feel equipped to teach about it.

That leadership vacuum matters.

If churches ignore AI, younger believers will navigate it alone. And Silicon Valley will happily become the new digital priesthood.

None of this means AI must be rejected entirely. Technology can assist Bible study, language translation, research and communication. But Christians -- especially young Christians -- must remember that information is not wisdom, and prediction is not truth. A chatbot cannot replace prayer, biblical literacy, Christian community or the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Church now faces an urgent challenge: teach young believers how to use technology without surrendering spiritual discernment to it.

Because once algorithms become trusted spiritual authorities, society risks creating a generation that no longer asks, "What does God say?" but instead asks, "What does the machine predict I want to hear?"

Fla.: Family of FSU mass shooting victim sues OpenAI, alleging ChatGPT aided in attack planning



Students hold a vigil near the scene of a shooting near the Florida State University student center on April 17, 2025 in Tallahassee, Florida. (Photo by Miguel J. Rodriguez Carrillo/Getty Images)

OAN Staff [Jenna Lee](#)

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In a legal challenge to the AI industry, Vandana Joshi — the widow of Florida State University dining staffer Tiru Chabba — has filed a federal lawsuit against OpenAI and its ChatGPT platform, alleging negligence and the provision of “substantial assistance” in the April 2025 campus shooting.

The 76-page complaint asserts that the suspected shooter, Phoenix Ikner, utilized the artificial intelligence as a tactical consultant to refine his plans over several months, including the days immediately preceding the attack that claimed two lives.

Representing the family, attorney Bakari Sellers revealed that the digital trail includes approximately 16,000 “disturbing chats” spanning an 18-month period, during which the chatbot reportedly provided specific logistical advice and mental reinforcement for the shooter’s delusions.

The lawsuit contends that by failing to trigger alerts or implement sufficient guardrails against such prolonged, violent inquiries, the company played a direct role in facilitating the commission of a crime.

“This is the same person who asked, you know, how can he become infamous? He asked about the Columbine shooting. He asked about what time should he go to campus? What time are most people going to be there?” said Sellers.

“He literally utilized open AI and Chat GPT as his co-conspirator, utilized it as a resource to carry out mass murder. There was nothing in place to prevent that from happening and so lives were lost. That’s the inherent danger, there has to be something in place to prevent that from happening,” he added.

The legal pressure on OpenAI has also intensified following an announcement from the legal team representing the family of Robert Morales, the FSU dining director and second victim of the tragedy, who confirmed their own plans to pursue litigation against the company and its AI platform.

This civil action is being mirrored by a significant state-level response, as Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier has officially launched a criminal investigation into OpenAI’s role in the shooting.

Uthmeier’s probe seeks to determine the extent of the platform’s involvement in the planning phases of the attack, further escalating the debate over whether AI developers can be held criminally liable for the actions of their users.

“Florida is leading the way in cracking down on AI’s use in criminal behavior, and if ChatGPT were a person, it would be facing charges for murder. This criminal investigation will determine whether OpenAI bears criminal responsibility for ChatGPT’s actions in the shooting at Florida State University last year,” said Uthmeier in a statement.

Ikner has pleaded not guilty and is tentatively set for a trial in October on charges of first-degree murder and attempted first-degree murder.

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