

2Corinthians – Week 40

I. Chapter 10

- A. After pleading with the Corinthians to renew their zeal for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, Paul now turns his attention to his critics and those who have been affected by them...
- B. 2Cor. 10:1 (ESV), *“I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—”*
- i. Apparently, Titus’ report has some bad news in it. He told them of the intruders, speaking trash about Paul.
 - ii. Paul gives them the reason why they should listen to his appeal – the gentleness of Christ!
 1. He did this in Romans 12:1 – by the mercies of God.
 - iii. Some interpret this verse as Paul making a self-evaluation.
 1. That is, he sees himself as being humble among them but bold in his letters to them.
 - iv. Others interpret this passage as Paul describing himself through the eyes of his critics: A coward!
 1. The NIV takes this understanding by putting quotes around the words “timid” and “bold.”
 - a. 2Cor. 10:1b (NIV), *“I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away”*
 - v. We will take the second interpretation as being the correct one.
 1. Paul’s goal is to debunk any illusion that some might have that he is only bold when he fires off some forceful letters from a safe distance to be delivered by his associates.
- C. 2Cor. 10:2 (ESV), *“I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh.”*
- i. Paul preferred to show meekness towards those affected by his critics, so he begs them not to force him to be bold towards them.
 - ii. He certainly doesn’t want another painful visit!
 - iii. However, he is ready to show boldness towards them if necessary.
 - iv. In either case, he will surely be bold towards those who’ve been affecting others with their negative talk of him and his companions.
 - v. For these critics were trying to malign his reputation and weaken his influence by...
 1. First...
 - a. By calling him “timid” when he was publicly humiliated in a nasty confrontation and didn’t stay to battle it out.
 - b. He responded with a bold letter and did not return as expected.
 - c. This may have given credence to the suspicion that he was not a spiritually authoritative apostle but a man of the flesh who was cowardly and ineffectual.
 - d. By contrast, the intruders appeared to embody what Paul may have appeared to have lacked:
 - i. They displayed a more commanding spiritual presence.
 - ii. They spoke with greater eloquence.
 - iii. To them, Paul was like the Wizard of Oz: Pulling levers and scaring people with props, only to find a bumbling and timid man behind the curtain.
 - iv. To them, Paul only dares to browbeat them in letters (cf. vs. 10).

2. **Second...**
 - a. **Accusing him of living or walking according to the flesh.**
 - i. **This may be referring to their opinion that Paul acts from worldly motives, saying one thing and doing another (cf. 1:12-24).**
 3. **Third...**
 - a. **By painting his physical appearance and speech as uninspiring (cf. vs. 10).**
 - i. **His physical appearance and perhaps his mannerisms and speech make him seemingly incompetent.**
 - ii. **He did not project “success” as the world would recognize it.**
- D. 2Cor. 10:3 (ESV), “*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.*”**
- i. **This accusation attacks Paul’s ministry, since Christianity is a movement that is not supposed to pattern itself to the standards of the world.**
 - ii. **So he readily admits that he and his companions do live in the flesh, that is, they live as mortals, jars of clay, in tents made of flesh and blood, subject to human frailty, but they do not live as worldly men nor do they fight battles the way the world does.**
 - iii. **Paul admits that there is a war going on.**
 1. **But the nature of this war is spiritual.**
 2. **So Paul must fight this battle using spiritual weapons.**
 - iv. **A worldly man deals with opposition using worldly weapons, such as...**
 1. **Swords and shields (military).**
 2. **Eloquent speech and worldly wisdom.**
 3. **Charisma (appearance).**
 4. **Manipulation, intimidation, flattery, distortion of truth.**
 - v. **However, all these weapons and tactics are ineffective against spiritual warfare and do not result in supernatural victories!**
 - vi. **Paul now uses three stages of ancient warfare to make his point:**
 1. **Destroy the opponent’s fortress (i.e., his stronghold)**
 2. **Take the captives.**
 3. **Punish the enemy.**
- E. 2Cor. 10:4 (ESV), “*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*”**
- i. **Earlier, Paul said he had “weapons of righteousness” in his right and left hands (2Cor. 6:7).**
 1. **A soldier in Paul’s day would have a sword, spear or lance on his right hand (offense) and on his left, a shield (defense).**
 2. **Using Ephesians 6:13-17, we would see the sword as the word of God and the shield as being faith.**
 3. **Other spiritual arsenals include prayer, agape love, holy living and the message of the gospel itself.**
 4. **In either case, these spiritual weapons had divine power to destroy the fortresses of those who stood in opposition to Paul’s apostleship and ministry.**
 5. **Paul was ready to use such “weapons” against his critics who have taken captives some of the hearts of the Corinthians.**

- F. 2Cor. 10:5 (ESV), “*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*”**
- i. Paul now describes the strongholds (or fortresses) mentioned in verse 4:**
 - 1. They represent the arguments and opinions that these critics have erected against Paul’s apostolic authority.**
 - 2. Since Christ appointed Paul as His apostle, anyone who went against his teachings went “*against the knowledge of God.*”**
 - ii. The captives represent all those whose thoughts were negatively affected by these workers of Satan.**
 - 1. Paul, like a war general, was prepared to use the arsenal of God to bring down these “strongholds” and free those who have been taken hostage by his critics.**
 - 2. Later on, in 11:3, Paul tells the Corinthians that their minds have been led astray by Satan.**
 - 3. Paul was determined to liberate them from the grips of Satan and set their minds back under the lordship of Christ.**
 - iii. This principle applies even towards those who oppose of Christ today.**
 - 1. God’s arsenal has the power to destroy arguments and opinion that promote:**
 - a. Atheism**
 - b. Scientism**
 - c. Religious philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Wiccan, etc.**
 - d. Cultural philosophies.**
 - 2. Do not fear nor give up on people when they first react poorly to the gospel.**
 - a. As 1Peter 3:15 says, always be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in you.**
 - b. For that defense, done in gentleness, may very well get them thinking and eventual win them over to Christ.**
- G. 2Cor. 10:6 (ESV), “*being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*”**
- i. The enemy represents the critics, along with those who continue to live in sin.**
 - ii. When the Corinthians all come to the right judgment that Paul is a true apostle, then the critics will be justly punished.**
 - 1. How? By having the church expel them from the church like they did to the previous offender in 2:6.**
 - iii. But this does to solely apply to the critics, but those who continue to live in defiance to God’s word! (cf. 12:21; 13:1-3)**