

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JUNE 22ND-23RD, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE (2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6) "NOW I, PAUL, MYSELF, APPEAL TO YOU..." (V. 1)

There is a definite shift in Paul's tone at this point in the letter—so far, he's been warm and encouraging, but now he's going to speak directly and boldly to his critics.

- The accusation against Paul was that he was "living according to the flesh" (v. 2).
- In other words, his character and integrity were being called into question.

Not only were Paul and his ministry team being criticized for being "fleshly," Paul was also being accused of timidity and cowardice.

- Apparently, Paul was not a very physically impressive or flashy leader (maybe not even that great of a preacher, see v. 10).
- Even though Paul's letters were bold and authoritative, in person, Paul had a very unassuming presence.

True spiritual power and true Christian leadership are found in displaying the "meekness and gentleness of Christ," not in impressive displays of charisma and religious power.

- Paul's writing was bold in the hopes that his critics would receive it and repent. Then when he came to Corinth, he wouldn't have to openly correct them (v. 2). Paul wasn't afraid of a fight—he was wise, mature, and Christ-like.

Those who shout the loudest are not always the most knowledgeable, unafraid, or bold—sometimes they're the most immature, unintelligent, foolish, and ignorant.

- Kindness, meekness, and self-control aren't signs of cowardice or weakness—they're signs of Christ-likeness.
- Jesus perfectly displayed wisdom in knowing when/how to speak and when/how to be quiet.

"WE DO NOT WAGE WAR ACCORDING TO THE FLESH..." (V. 3)

There is a God-honoring, Christ-exalting, spirit-filled way to step up to a spiritual fight, and there is a fleshly and worldly way to step up to a spiritual fight.

- Waging war "according to the flesh" looks like trying to win arguments with people to prove to them how right we are and how wrong they are.
- This approach simply relies on human intellect and abilities to try to win spiritual battles.

We can't fight spiritual battles with worldly weapons—instead, we're to rely on God's power (v. 4).

- When we take our spiritual battles to the Lord in prayer and then step into them filled with the Holy Spirit using wisdom from God's Word to know how to approach the situation, there is power present to demolish "strongholds."
- The strongholds Paul is referring to are the arguments and proud things opposed to the truth of God and the work of God through Paul's ministry.

Every false idea, every lie, and every inaccurate and unfair criticism and accusation made against God, His Word, and His people is no match for God and His truth.

- If you're on the side of God's truth, you've got nothing to worry about.
- Critics will criticize, slanderers will slander, proud people will mock, and haters of God will attack—but God will work it all out and we're to simply speak the truth, live the truth, and be like Christ.

In order to effectively do battle against this worldly way of thinking and behaving, our own thoughts must be taken captive and made obedient to Jesus (v. 5).

- If you want to step into your spiritual battles with God's power, you've got to let Jesus take dominion over your own thoughts of anger, bitterness, anxiety, lust, and evil.
- When we have a thought, we can either run with it and let it build a "stronghold" or we can choose to stop it and bring it to Jesus to take it captive.

If the Corinthian Christians wouldn't listen to Paul and pull down their strongholds of pride, contempt, and slander, Paul was ready to confront them in person and do it himself (v. 6).

- The power Paul relied on was not His own—it was God's power through the truth of God's Word and the power of His Spirit.
- What battles have you been trying to fight your own way through your own strength?

AUTHORITY (2 CORINTHIANS 10:7-11)

The Apostle Paul was apparently not a very impressive personality.

- The only physical description we have of him is from the "Acts of Paul" (100-160 A.D.), which says that he was a "...man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were far apart; he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long."

Paul was single, a scholar, probably had poor eyesight, and was painfully aware of his own weaknesses ("thorn in my flesh," 2 Corinthians 12:7).

- His critics said of him that "his letters are weighty and powerful, but his physical presence is weak" (v. 10).
- When Paul came to Corinth with the gospel, he didn't come in like a politician, salesman, or an impressive philosopher (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

"YOU ARE LOOKING AT THINGS...OUTWARDLY" (V. 7, NASB)

The problem with many of Paul's critics is that they were looking only at outward appearances, and by outward appearances, Paul didn't look like the mighty apostle that he supposedly was.

- Not only that, Paul's critics were judging his character based solely on what they saw on the surface.
- Regardless of what others saw of Paul on the surface, what really mattered was that Paul belonged to Christ.

Paul was confident in the authority and leadership responsibility God had given him (v. 8).

- This authority and responsibility had been given to him by God to build up the church, not to tear his opponents and critics down.
- God is the one who grants authority—in the church, in the home, in the workplace, and in government (Rom. 13). God grants authority so that we can do good, not rule over others with an iron fist!

Even though Paul's in-person presence, physical appearance, and public speaking left much to be desired, his letters were weighty, powerful, and even terrifying (vs. 9-10).

- To his critics, this was evidence that Paul was two-faced and weak. He was being accused of talking a big game through his writing and then being a coward when face-to-face.
- This wasn't an issue of cowardice, but wisdom.

Because Paul's style and presentation of speaking apparently weren't impressive enough for the Corinthians, written communication was the best way for them to receive the messages they needed.

- Paul essentially says in v. 11, "If you want the 'terrifying' Paul of my letters, you can have him! If you don't repent, next time I'm with you in person you'll see how serious and firm I can be."

True authority and leadership is given by God. It's given as an awesome responsibility for the purpose of building others up and doing good, not to reign over others, have a title, or promote ourselves.

- To be great in God's Kingdom, we must be servants at heart (Matthew 20:26-28).
- To genuinely serve and lead people, we must ask: "What's the wisest, most God-honoring approach to get the desired outcome? Am I trying to just prove a point or truly make a difference?"

BOAST IN THE LORD (2 CORINTHIANS 10:12-18)

Some of the "super-apostles" (Ch. 11, Judaizers?) who were leading the Corinthians astray and turning them against Paul were apparently very good at self-promotion (v. 12).

- But they were "measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves," and in so doing, they lacked spiritual understanding and insight.
- What exactly does this mean?

These "super-apostles" were evaluating their importance in the church by human standards: eloquence of public speaking, charismatic personalities, physical appearance, or adherence to man-made religious standards.

- Then they were comparing themselves to themselves by competing with one another for who was the most gifted, talented, and important in ministry.

Paul says, "they lack understanding:" real greatness in God's Kingdom is purity of heart, humility, holiness of life, a commitment to serving others, and a surrender and obedience to God's purposes and will.

- Paul's standard of self-evaluation was the extent to which he had obeyed God's call on his life, rather than comparing himself to others (v. 13).

Paul simply wants to be obedient to the area of ministry that God had assigned him.

- At the end of it all, success in the Christian life hinges entirely on obedience and faithfulness.
- The fact that God sent Paul to the Corinthians and they came to faith in Christ was proof of Paul's obedience and faithfulness to God's call on his life (v. 14).
- Fruit comes from obedience and faithfulness!

As the Corinthians grew in their obedience and faithfulness, their maturity and outreach would increase, and as it did, their church would grow and plant more churches (vs. 15-16).

- Paul wasn't interested in boasting or taking credit for what had been done in someone else's territory of ministry.
- Whatever work he did, God did it through him, and God alone should receive the glory.

CAN THE LORD COMMEND MY WORK? (VS. 17-18)

Ultimately, what matters most is not the praise, applause, or approval of other people—but the approval and commendation of the Lord.

- If we're going to glory or boast in anything, it shouldn't be in ourselves and what we're doing, but in the Lord and what He's doing through us.
- It doesn't matter what we say about our own accomplishments—it's what God thinks of them.

FIGHTING SPIRITUAL BATTLES (VS. 1-5)

- When we're in a spiritual fight (Ephesians 6:12), we can't win using physical weapons.
- We must rely on God above all else (1 Peter 5:7).
- We speak God's truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- We must take our own thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ.
- We must live out the truth of God through holy, righteous, Christ-like behavior.

AUTHORITY AND GREATNESS (VS. 7-11)

- Outward appearances can be deceiving—don't always trust or put too much stock in them.
- In the long run, godly character wins out over eloquence, talent, beauty, charisma, and giftings 100% of the time.
- If God has given you authority or leadership, your first priority is to ask the Lord to build your character and make you serve and lead like Jesus.

THE TRUE STANDARD OF SUCCESS (VS. 12-18)

- Evaluating your life through human standards and comparing yourself to other people is foolish—what matters is if you're being obedient and faithful to God's call on your life.
- It doesn't matter what I might say about my own accomplishments or success—what does God think about my life? Is my life about serving others and giving God glory or simply serving myself?