

## 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 – “The Weapons of our Warfare”

Ever gone through false accusations, or just had people be overly critical of you? Were you tempted to fire back or put them in their place? This can be a very hard place to be in and we can wonder what our response should be in these times.

- I remember someone one time accusing me of toilet papering their house. Now it was true, I did it, but it still hurt that they automatically suspected me



Here in Corinth the clamour of the critics has been growing against Paul. They attempted to discredit him and undermine him so that they could gain the power and prestige in the church at Corinth.

And it's true that if we live honest, integral lives, we don't always need to defend ourselves – God is our defense.

- And yet in these last 4 chapters of 2 Corinthians, from chapters 10-13, we see Paul taking aim against his critics (often times quite sarcastically) and defending his own authority.
- Now to some of us, this might seem a little self-serving, but the reason Paul does so is because he doesn't want the work that was established in Corinth to be hijacked and derailed. He doesn't want this minority of people to undo all the good that's happened for Christ in Corinth.

So over these last 4 chapters we're seeing Paul get a little more feisty and fight. But he keeps things in perspective. This is not a battle to wage in the flesh, this is a battle that is fought on a different level – one that we'll be dealing with today.

“A close look at all four chapters seems to reveal the extent and the viciousness of what was being said about him by a very aggressive minority in the church at Corinth. Evidently, they said: (1) that Paul was only brave when he was writing letters but cowardly in face-to-face situations (10:1, 9–10); (2) that his refusal to accept support was a sign that he was inferior (12:13–16); (3) that he did not have the same kind of relationship to Christ that they had (10:7). In addition, (4) they made fun of his appearance and of his speaking ability (11:6); and (5) they said that his boasting was unbecoming of an apostle (10:8). While these five charges do not exhaust the list, we can see from them what Paul was dealing with. His answers are spread out over the last four chapters of the letter.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chafin, K. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1985). *1, 2 Corinthians* (Vol. 30, p. 267). Thomas Nelson Inc.

## 1. Attacks from False Apostles – 10:1-2

**10:1 - 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.**

One piece of criticism or attack against Paul by his critics was to say that his bark was worse than his bite. They would say that as long as Paul was with pen in hand, and thousands of miles away, he could come across as strong and bold as he wanted to. But in person, it was another story all together. They tried to claim that Paul was quite soft and timid in person.

But they misunderstood the meekness of Paul for weakness.

- This is how Paul is identifying himself as. Or at least he's pleading with them through a spirit of meekness to listen and receive what he is saying.

Now Paul is no stranger to being bold, brash, and bombastic. Before he came to Christ he was out there causing problems for many Christians and making life hard for them:

- **Acts 26:10–11**, *"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."*
- This certainly didn't sound like nice meek and gentle Paul we're reading about now. What gives? Paul met Jesus! And Jesus transformed his life. Now he's pleading with the believers in Corinth through this **meekness and gentleness** to receive him and follow his instructions.
- Notice that Paul says it's by the meekness and gentleness **of Christ**. Paul is modeling this life of Christ. He's not succumbing to the person he was and just defaulting to the *'this is just the way I am'* line. There was a noticeable change in Paul that came through Christ.
- Are you allowing Him to change you and continue His work in you? How often have you settled on the statement, *'this is just the way I am'*. Well, if it's not representing Jesus, or not biblical, change. You don't have to remain that way in Christ.
- When I got married, I tried a few times to say, *'Honey, I don't do dishes, it's just the way I am...'* My wife said, *'Well, I don't make dinner for people who don't do dishes, it's just the way I am.'* And of course, I'm a dish washing

veteran now. But we should be willing to change, more so, we should be willing to be more like Christ.

Notice, this description Paul gives models Jesus. The only autobiographical statement Jesus gave of Himself is in **Matthew 11:29**, *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

Paul repeats these attributes saying that he is pleading with this meekness and gentleness. He comes to them in a **lowly** manner. This means he comes humbly, without trying to raise himself up.

- But again, the people that were undermining Paul mistook this meekness for weakness. They saw humility as futility.
- But meekness really means strength under control. Jesus was meek, yet there were times He exercised His authority. He would come into the temple and overturn the moneychangers. He bent down to gather cords so as to make a whip (John 2:15) and drive out all that were desecrating this place. This was not out of control Jesus, this was strength under control Jesus. He did what was needed, and what was needed was a holy spanking.

In the end of verse 1, Paul was just somewhat sarcastically repeating the sentiment of his critics, that he was lowly in person, but bold in writing.

- We've all written those emails that we wish we could delete after hitting send. Many of us have experienced the boldness that can come out in writing that wouldn't if we were in person.
- In fact Apple has created a feature by which you can now have 10 seconds after sending an email to unsend it. Or you can delay the time the email actually sends. Why? Because they know we all do say things rashly in the heat of the moment and need some time to think it through.

But this wasn't what Paul was doing. He simply spoke the truth, and he spoke it unreservedly and boldly. It wasn't that he was timid in person, he just wanted to model the gentleness and kindness of Jesus.

But he certainly knew there were times where boldness was necessary.

**10:2 - *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.***

Paul's kind of warning his critics that if they think he's just a big softy in person, it's time to batten down the hatches, because they're about to see a different side of Paul. This isn't what Paul wants to do necessarily, but because of the problems that these false apostles were causing, he's not going to go easy on them.

- You've all come to know me as a gentle, kind, loving, sympathetic, caring, handsome, modest, humble guy. But when someone comes in that wants to cause problems or harm to the church or my family, I'm gonna go hulk on them – in love of course.
- I remember a time at another church I was at, a person came in that was trying to hand out information that was not in line with what we believed. I gently told them that it was not acceptable. Well it continued to happen despite my warnings, and then I just finally had to tell this person no more, and I raised my voice, exercised some authority, and practically threw them out. That little 98 year old woman barely knew what hit her.

Paul's not wanting these believers in Corinth to get hit with the wrong word. He wants them to receive him and dismiss these false apostles. He doesn't want them to get hit by the crossfire that is intended for these false apostles – the ones Paul is reserving this boldness for.

## 2. Actions of True Apostles – 10:3-6

**10:3 - *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.*** Though these critics were claiming that Paul was just walking according to the flesh, he makes a distinction now regarding walking *in the flesh*, verses *according to the flesh*.

- Paul walks in the flesh in the sense that he's flesh and bone; he's human like we are. His critics tried to make this about his morality.
- But Paul simply retorts that *we do not war according to the flesh*. In other words, we don't get drawn into battles using human ingenuity or worldly methods. That's the wrong fight.

**10:4-5 - *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, <sup>5</sup> 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,***

Paul was entering into a battle with these false apostles and their false accusations, but Paul's weaponry was not of a physical nature (**carnal**). Rather it's a spiritual nature. These are weapons that are **mighty in God** for pulling down strongholds. They're more beneficial than any other kind of weapon.

Paul uses the Greek word *ochuroma* for **strongholds**. It's the only time it's used in the N.T. It meant a castle or fortress and is further defined as anything on which one relies. It can also speak of the arguments and reasonings by which a disputant endeavours to fortify his opinion and defend it against his opponent.

The strongholds mentioned in vs. 4 were the various arguments or theories that those in the church were bringing against Paul. This is why Paul says in vs. 5 that these spiritual weapons **cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God**. These corrupted people coming into Corinth were looking to promote their way, their thought, and agenda. And in so doing were expressing their way was better than God's way. They were exalting themselves against God. Now when you see these kinds of things going on it can begin to get your blood boiling. And you want to engage these things on a physical level because our flesh gets riled.

Yet Paul saw that he didn't have to fight against them in the flesh. In fact, when we begin to fight against these things in the flesh, we become defeated. We're no longer to be ruled or mastered by the flesh. And when we begin to engage in battle in a carnal matter, which may not be just physically but through the same means as the world (such as gossip or slander) we enter into the devil's playground. Satan knows if he can draw us into battle in the flesh, he's got us. He's got us right where he wants us because we'll never win this way.

We need to rely upon the weapons that God has given us. Paul lists them in **Ephesians 6:14–18**, *"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; <sup>18</sup> praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—"*

This is how we are able to stand up against the attacks of the enemy or enemy inspired attacks from others.



The key is knowing that we don't fight in the realm of the physical or carnal. We don't get into a war of words, or attacking each other. We are defeated when we do. We press on spiritually, for it's in the spiritual realm that Christ has given us the victory.

Now these strongholds get built up by the enemy and those influenced by Satan. These are fortresses on the **outside**, but there's also fortresses on the **inside**. We need to be aware that these strongholds can be internal when we begin to give the enemy a foothold in a certain area of our lives; when we succumb to fleshly desires or attitudes and emotions that are in opposition to God and His Word.

This is why Paul says that we need to **bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ**.

The devil would love to bring you into a place where your thought life makes you a prisoner. Where you are weakened and defeated before you even take any physical action. This is why we read:

**Ephesians 6:12–13**, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

We need to take every thought captive because the enemy is operating on a level that is often unseen. Our battle is not physical, and it's not always with must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Does it line up with the truth of God's Word? Does it please the Lord? If not, throw that thought out, hit the delete button, put it in the trash! Just get rid of it and get rid of it quick. That's a daily discipline we as believers need to have.

**Philippians 4:8–9**, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. <sup>9</sup> The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."*

**10:6 - and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.**

Paul was ready to come and confront their disobedience. He wouldn't just talk the talk he would walk the walk (the very thing they said he didn't do in vs. 1). But first he would give them time for those to become obedient to these things he is writing about.

Are we walking in obedience to the things of God?

We must remember that we are in a battle. The Word reminds us many times how the Christian is called to warfare:

- **2 Corinthians 6:7**, *"by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,"*
- **1 Timothy 1:18**, *"This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,"*
- **2 Timothy 2:3–4**, *"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."*
- **2 Timothy 4:7**, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

Keep fighting the good fight soldier. It's a battle worth fighting for. But understand what the battle actually is. Recognize who the real enemy is. And know the right weapons we are to use – they are of God, and they are mighty in God.