

Lesson 18: 2 Corinthians 10:1-4

1) The Relationship of Chapters 10-13 to the Remainder of the Letter

- a) So far in this letter, Paul has defended his frank criticism of the Corinthians in his severe letter (2:14-7:3), has rejoiced over their demonstration of loyalty to him during Titus' visit (7:4-16), and pressed them to complete their collection for the saints in Jerusalem and give generously (8:1-9:15).
- b) But in Chapters 10-13, Paul -- perhaps unexpectedly -- switches from a conciliatory posture to a combatant one.
 - i) He indicts the Corinthians for an assortment of vices that he fears they still engage in; he warns them he may have to be severe on his next visit; he chastises them for being hoodwinked and led astray by false teachers; he chides them for thinking they are wise when they are putting up with fools.
 - ii) Paul devotes most of his attention to defending himself against unnamed detractors. He attacks them as boastful interferers, as fools, as false apostles, as deceitful workers, and as ministers of Satan masquerading as ministers of God.
 - iii) Paul pulls out all the stops in trying to rally the Corinthians to his point of view and to reject the false teachers who have beguiled and badgered them.
- c) Many commentators have wondered how this scorching blast in these chapters could follow an appeal for money.
 - i) Some of their theories are very imaginative: that Paul's dictation of the letter was interrupted by a sleepless night that resulted in a sour mood or that bad news arrived from Corinth indicating that they were not as securely in his camp as Titus had led him to believe.
 - ii) Many argue that Chapters 10-13 are the severe letter that Paul refers to in Chapters 1-9 and thus make up First and a Half Corinthians, so to speak. And it is true that Chapters 10-13 has a tone of severity. But for those problems that remained after his first severe letter, why is it surprising that Paul would again use a severe tone in a follow up to that letter?
 - (1) Similarities in subject and tone between the severe letter and Chapters 10-13 do not prove that they are one and the same; they only prove what we already know -- that Paul was continuing to deal with the numerous problems in the church at Corinth.
 - (2) These final four chapters and the severe letter were written by the same person to the same people about the same problems and with the same

purpose (13:11). Are we surprised if they are similar?

- iii) Many who view these chapters as a fragment of a separate letter that someone for unknown reasons edited and appended to another letter consider the evidence so convincing that they place the burden of proof on those who hold to the integrity of the epistle -- but that is not the way it works. If one can make sense of the canonical text as it stands, the burden of proof must be placed on those who hold the various partition theories. They must explain how and why one would have edited the epistles in such a supposedly unsatisfactory way.
- iv) Some of them point to what they say are inconsistencies between Chapters 1-9 and 10-13, but those alleged problems vanish when the sections in which they occur are considered in context.
 - (1) Some, for example, complain that Paul's expression of joy over their repentance in Chapter 7 seems to conflict with his stern warnings in Chapters 10 and 12. But the joy in Chapter 7 involved their godly sorrow over one particular issue. Paul also had a stern warning in 6:14-7:1, which shows that Paul did not regard every issue in the church to have been resolved.
- v) Finally, a number of commentators argue that Paul was in these final chapters employing a common rhetorical strategy of the day by taking a harsher tone in a final emotional appeal designed to stir his readers into action. And we will see a wide range of rhetorical devices at work in these chapters -- irony, sarcasm, mock humility, and contrast.
 - (1) The so-called foolish discourse in Chapter 11 is an interesting piece of evidence. Paul "speaks as a fool" to invite the Corinthians to look past the surface meaning and see things correctly. This use of irony, one commentator notes, relies on a sympathetic audience; it in a sense creates a "communication conspiracy" and a bond between the speaker and his audience. With the wrong audience it can have the opposite of its intended effect. ("You're speaking as a fool, Paul, because you are a fool!") Why would Paul risk such a device in his earlier severe letter? He likely would not have done so. Why risk it here? Because he had a report from Titus that the Corinthians were zealous to do what was right! Paul now had some confidence that his audience was back on his side!
- d) There are many key themes from the first 9 chapters that are repeated in Chapters 10-13.
 - i) Paul continues and expands in these chapters his key theme that God works through weakness. He talked about earthen vessels in Chapter 4. In 12:10 he will tell us "when I am weak, then am I strong." And the emphasis in Chapters 8-9 on divine grace is a perfect prelude to Paul's return to his theme

of human weakness.

- ii) Paul also continues to rebut any suggestion that he is somehow insufficient as an apostle. He dealt with this theme in 2:16 and 3:5-6. He returns to that theme in Chapter 11 when he contrasts himself with the false apostles that were plaguing that congregation.
- iii) The theme of commendation also returns. Earlier Paul said that he did not need to commend himself to the Corinthians again because he was not responsible for the breach in their relationship. His rivals, however, were falsely commending themselves and boasting beyond measure. In 12:11, Paul tells the Corinthians that they should have commended him and defended him when he was challenged by the false apostles.
- iv) Chapters 2-7 were a defense of Paul's boldness in writing the severe letter. Paul returns to that theme of boldness in these chapters by telling them that he will be no less bold in person than he was in that earlier letter. In a sense, Chapters 2-7 defend the past while Chapters 10-13 prepare for the future.
- v) In Chapter 9, Paul said that he was going to make another visit to Corinth. In Chapters 10-13 Paul repeatedly refers to that upcoming visit.
- vi) Also, in 12:18 Paul says that he had sent Titus to Corinth. Chapter 7 tells us more about that visit, and in particular tells us that it was Titus who told Paul about the positive outcome of his severe letter. This is additional evidence that these chapters are not that earlier severe letter.
- vii) Paul described his opponents in Chapters 2-3 as those who peddle the word of God for profit and do not preach Christ. In these closing chapters he returns to that topic and describes them as people who preach another Jesus, who proclaim a different gospel, and who masquerade as apostles of Christ.
 - (1) And when we read those descriptions, is it any wonder that Paul changed his tone in these concluding chapters?
 - (2) Paul never names or addresses these rivals directly, which has prompted many hypotheses about their identity.
 - (a) What we can know about them must be inferred from the text. They apparently are proud of their Jewish heritage (11:22) and skillful in the rhetorical arts (11:6), which would suggest they were strongly influenced by their Hellenistic environment. They were also boastful of various accomplishments, visions, and revelations that they claimed proved that Christ speaks in them (13:3).
 - (b) From Paul's point of view, however, they are aligned with the forces of evil and are thoroughly evil themselves, and they must be blocked from having

any influence in the church.

- (c) The heart of the quarrel concerns the issue of Paul's authority, but Paul is not on a personal vendetta (12:19). Instead, Paul understands that an attack against his authority is an attack against the gospel. Paul defends his reputation, but his goal is not to save his reputation. Instead, his goal is to save the church from fools and a false gospel.
- (3) This influx of Judaizers most likely occurred after Paul wrote First Corinthians because that epistle does not explicitly counteract this group.
- (4) Corinth was tolerating these false teachers, and Paul knew that there would never be peace and harmony in that congregation while this situation continued. They had invaded the church to undermine his authority and destroy his work in the Lord, and the Corinthians were letting it happen. Are we really surprised at his tone?
- (5) "They were Judaists at work, impugning his authority and corrupting his Gospel; there was at least a minority of the church under their influence; there were large numbers living, apparently, in the grossest sins; there was something, we cannot but think, approaching spiritual anarchy."
- (6) Paul restored and strengthened his relationship with the Corinthians in Chapters 1-9. With the membership firmly on his side, he now completes his epistle by alerting them to the spiritual dangers they face from these false apostles.

2) Chapter 10:1-6

- a) **Verse 1: Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:**
 - i) Verses 1-2 introduces two key ideas that Paul will address:
 - (1) First, they introduce the mistaken opinion of some that Paul wavers between boldness in his letters and timidity in person.
 - (2) Second, they introduce Paul's own conviction that his style of ministry is modeled after Christ.
 - ii) Paul begins this section authoritatively with an emphatic, "Now I Paul myself."
 - (1) This emphatic self-reference is intended to introduce the weight of Paul's apostolic authority.
 - (2) Paul wants their full attention. You can almost see them sit up straight in

their chairs at this point when this letter was first read to them.

iii) But Paul does not exercise his apostolic authority in a vacuum. He does so by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

(1) Paul packs high-powered, divine weapons, but the meekness and gentleness of Christ always govern their use.

(2) Christ, as always, is our perfect example. He employed extraordinary power with an even more extraordinary meekness and kindness. He is Paul's model as Paul employs the power he has been given.

(3) "Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength." -- Eric Hoffer

(4) Rulers and presidents often hide their weakness behind brute force, but the the King of kings and the Lord of lords rules with meekness and gentleness.

(5) The word translated "meekness" was used in classic literature for a calm and soothing disposition that contrasted with rage and savagery. It implies moderation, which permits reconciliation. Josephus used the word to refer to rulers who were courteous and had a gentle disposition. It was viewed as a key virtue in those who had power over others, and one that was particularly crucial for a teacher.

(a) Barclay: "Aristotle defined it as the correct mean between being too angry and being never angry at all. It is the quality of the man whose anger is so controlled that he is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. It describes the man who is never angry at any personal wrong he may receive, but who is capable of righteous anger when he sees others wronged. By using that word Paul is saying at the very beginning of his stern letter that he is not carried away by personal anger, but is speaking with the strong gentleness of Jesus himself."

(b) **Matthew 11:29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

(c) "Jesus' yoke is easy because he treats his disciples as yokefellowes rather than as camels and donkeys to be loaded down."

(d) Paul mentioned meekness in his first letter. **1 Corinthians 4:21** What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

(e) Meekness is not weakness, but rather meekness requires great strength.

(6) The word translated "gentleness" was regarded as an essential quality of

a judge.

- (a) It was used to denote an easy-going quality that moderates the inflexible severity of wrath, a fairness that corrects anything that might be odious or unjust in the strict application of the law.
- (b) Barclay: He translates it as "sweet reasonableness." The Greeks themselves defined it as "that which is just and even better than just." They described it as that quality which must enter in when justice, just because of its generality, is in danger of becoming unjust. There are times when strict justice can actually result in injustice. Sometimes real justice is not to insist on the letter of the law, but to let a higher quality enter into our decisions. The man who has "gentleness" is the man who knows that, in the last analysis, the Christian standard is not justice, but love. By using this word Paul is saying that he is not out for his rights and to insist on the letter of the law; but is going to deal with this situation with that Christlike love which transcends even the purest of human justice.
- (c) Jesus demonstrated this quality when he was confronted by those about to stone the woman caught in adultery.
- (d) Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3:3 that this quality is a requirement for an elder.

(7) Appealing to Christ's virtues of meekness and gentleness does two things:

- (a) First, it shows that Paul takes for granted his authority over them because these virtues are the virtues of one who voluntarily does not make full use of the power that his superior position justly allows.
 - (i) Rejecting an arrogant and domineering attitude over his charges does not mean that Paul lacks authority, as some infer, but instead means that Paul is like Christ.
 - (b) Second, the reference to these virtues shows Paul's goodwill toward the Corinthian Christians.
 - (i) He wants to be moderate and lenient toward them, and he hopes they will respond in a way that makes a drastic show of his authority unnecessary -- but he promises them that he will change his approach if needed.
- iv) The interlopers had been freely slandering Paul in his absence, and Paul here lists one of their accusations -- that he is timid when present and bold only when absent. He repeats their charge again in verse 10.
- (1) Paul wants to debunk any illusion that some might have that he is only bold when he fires off hot letters from a safe distance to be delivered by his associates. He will tell them that there is a continuity between the apostle who writes these letters and the apostle who would soon come

and see them in person.

- (2) The problem was that the Corinthians had mistaken Paul's gentleness for timidity.
 - (3) Paul had earlier admitted that the world viewed him as one dishonored and of no reputation. Unfortunately, the world's scorn for Christ's apostle had permeated Christ's church.
 - (4) "Certainly foolish persons universally scorn men of no reputation and pay no heed to them, even though they may chance to be giving most excellent advice; but, on the other hand, when they see men being honored by the multitude or by persons of greatest power, they do not disdain to be guided by them."
 - (5) The Corinthian culture embraced those who projected themselves with vigor and force. They gladly put up with Paul's haughty rivals who enslave them, prey upon them, and take advantage of them.
 - (6) But of course they all have misread Paul, and while Paul admits he is weak, they all fail to see how God's power is shown in that weakness. Paul will boast of his weakness in Chapters 11-12.
 - (7) And if they criticize Paul because he appears weak, what would these false apostles and their followers say about Jesus who "was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God"? (13:4)
- v) Finally, Paul is issuing a warning in these opening verses. He is ready and able to wage war against these false apostles, but he is hoping he won't have to.
- (1) The meekness of Christ that they have witnessed in him does not compel him to continue to turn the other cheek when challenged by false apostles or to sit idly by as ministers of Satan attempt a hostile takeover of the congregation. Like Christ, who boldly confronted the Pharisees when they challenged his authority, Paul is prepared to come to Corinth with guns blazing.
- b) **Verse 2: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.**
- i) Whether Paul will be meek and gentle when he next visits them depends on how they respond to his letter. He prefers meekness, but he will show boldness if necessary.

- ii) Paul alludes in verse 2 to two charges that had been lodged against him.
- (1) We have already discussed the first -- that he was timid when present and bold only when absent.
 - (a) This reputation may have arisen after the confrontation during his brief painful visit that was followed by a severe letter. Some, no doubt, pointed to those events and argued that Paul was only a "paper apostle."
 - (2) The second accusation is related to the first -- that Paul walks according to the flesh.
 - (a) This phrase is open to a variety of interpretations. It may be an accusation that he lives according to the standards of the world, or that he acts from worldly motives, or that he is inconsistent and unreliable.
 - (b) This charge may also be related to Paul's unimposing physical presence and ineffective speech. (2 Corinthians 10:10 "but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.") Paul it seems did not project success as the world would recognize it.
 - (c) Later in Chapter 12 we will study Paul's thorn in the flesh, which may be related to his weak physical appearance.
 - (d) Paul referred to this charge back in Chapter 1, which provides yet another link between these chapters and the rest of the letter.
 - (i) **2 Corinthians 1:17** When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, **do I purpose according to the flesh**, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?
- iii) The ESV translates verse 2 as follows: "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."
- (1) Paul plans to be very bold indeed when it comes to confronting the false apostles who are threatening the church in Corinth, and he begs them to heed his warnings so he will not have to be that bold against the Christians themselves.
 - (2) But in any event Paul is prepared to do what is required.
 - (a) "The apostle is in combat with some false teachers, few in number, who methodically plot their course of action and use slander and misrepresentation to gain their ends. The longer they stay in Corinth, the more followers they will gain."
 - (b) If the Corinthian congregation had elders (and I think we should assume it

did), they had failed in their responsibilities.

(c) **Titus 1:9-11** [An elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. 10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

(d) Thus, an elder must know the word so that he can know when it is contradicted. Further, an elder must be able to proclaim the word so that he can give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. And finally, an elder must have the courage to silence those who teach what they ought not to teach.

(e) Thus, Titus gives us three qualifications for an elder -- (1) knowledge, (2) ability, and (3) courage. If any one of those three required qualifications is lacking, then that elder will be unable to fulfill his mandate from God and the church will suffer as a result. That appears to have been the case in Corinth as these false apostles had evidently not yet been silenced.

iv) Many today have an impression that Paul was pugnacious and uncompromising, hard to get along with, and always on the warpath. It is interesting to discover that the Corinthians' perspective of Paul was quite the opposite and that Paul felt compelled to convince the Corinthians in the next verses that he is not timid but bold.

c) **Verses 3-4: For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)**

i) In verses 3-6, Paul lets the Corinthians know that he will not be cowering in fear when he arrives on his next visit as some of them apparently expect. And he employs a series of military metaphors to make that point:

(1) He wages war (v. 3), he has weapons of warfare to destroy strongholds (v. 4), he tears down raised obstacles (v. 5), he takes captives (v. 6), and he stands on military alert ready to punish rebels (v. 6).

ii) Walking is a Greek idiom for living, and "flesh" characterizes human behavior as a purely worldly activity and perspective.

(1) Paul is saying here what Jesus said in John 17:14-16 -- we are in the world, but not of the world.

(2) That is, Paul readily admits that he lives in the world, but he does not conform to the world's standards.

- (3)** Barclay's paraphrase: "I am a human being with a human body, but I never allow myself to be dominated by purely human motives. I never try to live without God."
- iii)** Paul serves in the Lord's army, and even though the battle is ferocious, the outcome is certain. Christ's victory is sure.
- (1)** Satan knows that his time is running out, and so he uses every available weapon to resist defeat. In his arsenal he has the weapons of deceit, lies, subterfuge, guile, intimidation, compulsion, and force.
- (2)** God's soldiers must use God's weapons, not those of Satan. Among God's armaments are truth, honesty, justice, holiness, and faithfulness.
- iv)** The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.
- (1)** We are engaged in a spiritual battle, and our weapons must be spiritual weapons.
- (2)** Paul describes our weapons in Ephesians 6.
- (a)** Ephesians 6:11-17 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
- (b)** The only offensive weapon in that list is the word of God, which is called the sword of the Spirit.
- (3)** What about politics? Is that a weapon we should use in our spiritual battle? If we elect the right person then abortion will be out and prayer will be back in, right? There are several problems with that idea. First, the nine people who keep abortion in and prayer out were not elected by any of us. Second, experience should tell us that politicians who get elected by single-issue voters have no reason to take that issue off the table. Third, it is extremely dangerous to mix politics with religion because history tells us that the chances are much greater that such a mixture will be used against us than for us. Fourth, we should rely on the arm of God rather than the arm of man in our spiritual battle.
- v)** The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of

strong holds.

(1) John Knox lived by the motto, "With God, man is always in the majority."
And with majority, Christians can destroy Satan's strongholds.

(2) What are Satan's strongholds?

- (a)** They appear in many forms, but are essentially the same. They are the systems, schemes, structures, and strategies that Satan designs to frustrate and obstruct the progress of the Gospel.
- (b)** The false religions of the world are strongholds of Satan. He uses them to create confusion and convince people that they do not need Jesus.
- (c)** Satan uses false religions to slander Christians as, for example, the world is convinced by the press that there is no difference between fundamentalist Muslims and so-called fundamentalist Christians.
- (d)** Satan uses false religions to prevent the spread of the Gospel as, for example, the importation of Bibles into Arab countries is prohibited.
- (e)** Christianity is most certainly at war with Islam, and vice versa. Unlike Islam, however, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. We are locked in a spiritual battle with Islam and any other false religion that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.
- (f)** I have seen people on several occasions say that there is no difference between fundamentalist Muslims and so-called fundamentalist Christians -- a group that is never defined but that probably includes us. And there are some similarities -- most notably, we both take religion very seriously. But the similarity ends there, and one of the most striking differences (beyond the infinite difference between Jesus Christ and Mohammed, who one day will come out of the grave he is in and bend his knee to Jesus Christ) must be these verses here in 2 Corinthians -- the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

(3) How can we defeat such strongholds?

- (a)** We will never defeat Satan with a guided missile or a smart bomb. Such carnal weapons are necessary for Americans to defend our country against physical opponents, but they are useless for Christians to defend the gospel against spiritual opponents.
- (b)** Certainly the lines can sometimes be blurred. The American defending his country may also be a Christian, or the opponent of America's physical army may also be a spiritual opponent of the church. But we must never doubt that even in such a situation, there are two battles going on -- a fleshly battle and a spiritual battle -- and we must not combine them. Even if we win the fleshly battle, the spiritual battle will continue. The fleshly battle may open news areas of the world for the spread of the gospel, and may very well be

part of God's providence in creating those open doors -- but even so our weapons are not carnal. The spiritual battle does not end when the door is opened.

- (c)** From the perspective of our own government, even a best case scenario in Iraq ends with that country still a Muslim country. That is when the spiritual battle can really begin, assuming that in a "free Iraq" it is not illegal to import Bible and it is not a capital crime to convert to Christianity (as it is in the "free Afghanistan"). We should pray that peace will come quickly in Iraq and that our victory will open doors in that country for the spread of the gospel.
- (d)** If we are to win a spiritual battle, we must do so with the only offensive weapon in our arsenal, the word of God. If we use any other weapon (be it politics, a bomb, or a gun) to wage a spiritual battle, we have gone astray.
- (e)** 2 Timothy 2:8-9 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!
- (f)** Isaiah 55:10-11 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."
- (g)** Paul tells us that our weapons are mighty! If we ever doubt the power of God's word, then we have lost the battle before it even begins. God's word can go places we cannot go and it can do things we cannot do. The word of God can enter Satan's strongholds and demolish the opposition. It can soften hearts; it can change lives; it has the power to save.
- (h)** James 1:21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.