

## “Weapons of our Warfare”

- 2 Corinthians 10 -

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at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wis  
on March 6, 2022



**2 Corinthians 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. 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. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 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, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 7 Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's. 8 For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed— 9 lest I seem to terrify you by letters. 10 "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." 11 Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present. 12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. 13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, 16 to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. 17 But "he who glories, let him glory in the LORD." 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Paul seems to be charging boldly into chapter ten, some would say perhaps even with an air of confrontation. That could take us by surprise given the fact that he had essentially just praised this church in chapters 8 and 9 for their actions concerning their financial giving, their service and support of others, even having noted their revival of spirit and obedience. However, even with a reputation of discipline, faithfulness, and passion, a church is not immune to spiritual warfare. The enemy hadn't and *hasn't* thrown in the towel because he is so impressed and he sure isn't daunted by a dynamic fellowship.

Paul indeed was a gracious man, but not so much with his critics. He knew that not everyone was “on board” with this heart of repentance that he had been speaking of and some of them just frankly didn't like him. In this chapter we see a Paul that was not always readily visible, not often manifested, and which he generally avoided.

This was the “warrior” Paul, the “take-no-prisoners” evangelist we have come to admire and respect. Such a passionate heart will make a pastor famous for sure, for good or for bad. Some will love him for it. Some will vilify him. That much has not changed in 2000 years. The masses will love you or hate you for such a passion, but they won't ignore you, that's for sure!

### 10:1

A.W. Tozer once said that “*The Christian life is not a playground, it's a battleground.*” One's grasp of that truth will be the difference between a dynamic Christian walk and one that is essentially just stumbling around in the dark. This is the line between success and failure.

So far, Paul's language had been in the context of “*we,*” but now it suddenly becomes very personal with the use of “*I, Paul...*” Let us note that in no way is Paul demanding his way here, no doubt cognizant of the fact

that he cannot make anyone do what they do not want to do. He is not behaving as a tyrant or a thug. Rather he pleads with them, invoking the very nature of Christ; *one of meekness and gentleness*. Yet at the same time he isn't going to back down either. Again, neither did Christ Himself.

Paul presents a picture of himself to them, *no doubt with irony*, that reflected what many of them apparently saw in him; a picture of weakness while he is with them, but a bold giant when he wrote to them. Clearly this was the skewed reputation he had on the street. There is an absolute fact in ministry which says that any pastor who is "worth his salt" will be on the receiving end of people who will verbally slander him. That's not a "poor me" attitude but a scriptural fact. Jesus said in John 15 "*If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.'* Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the One who sent me." 2 Timothy 3:12 says "*Yes, and **everyone** (not just pastors) who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*"

Ironically, the persecution that was meted out against Paul, the other apostles, and even Jesus Himself came because there were those who just didn't want to hear the truth. Sound familiar? Nothing has changed really. "If you can't debate them, then attack them." This is a classic action of those who cannot scripturally or even practically counter another's argument. Their thinking goes, "*If you can't prove them wrong, then belittle them, call them names and, yes, lie a little if you need to!*"

I am obliged to point out here also, that these attacks weren't coming from the street. No, they were coming from *within* the religious establishment. We think such is so strange, yet that was exactly what Paul was dealing with even 2000 years ago! There is something inside our human hearts that just loves dirty laundry. We so easily believe negative press about people don't we? We judge and execute according to the vast courtroom of public opinion.

## 10:2

There were those in Corinth who wanted to see Paul as a "carnal" man, meaning that he was controlled by his flesh and not by the Spirit. This evidently stemmed from his having to be bold with a few of them in the past...I.E. *his first letter*, which was no doubt in a *corrective* manner.

A pastor can be at one time considered second only to the likes of spiritual giants like Billy Graham, Moody, or Spurgeon, then after having to strongly correct someone, fall to the position of Satan incarnate overnight! Indeed a pastor walks a fine line, however imperfect, between the meek and mild Jesus and the One who turned over the tables of the money changers and drove them from the temple with a whip! Certainly, *my* reputation also runs the gamut from clown, to "milk toast weak," to the "offensive Nazi."

Paul had ministered for a very long time to the Corinthian believers. He had worked, prayed, toiled, and supported himself financially, all while teaching and preaching the Word. He had praised them when they acted in holiness, and verbally spanked them when they were disobedient and rebellious. Through it all, he strived to reach lost sinners and bring them to Christ, and then to disciple each one of them that they might fulfill all that God had called them to within the larger body of Christ. He had seen the hand of God grow and develop the church in a grand manner. But he knew they were not done! Shepherding is a "cradle to the grave" calling, and the work is in fact "never done."

Now there had arisen from within the church, those who had declared themselves *his* enemies and were ultimately enemies of the gospel. Note that Paul wasn't being accused of false teaching, sexual misconduct, financial mismanagement or ungodly living. No, his detractors were throwing the only ammo they had at him: *he was weak, he was mean and he was two-faced.*

### 10:3-5

In ministry there is always so much that could cause one to be beaten down and discouraged. Many pastor's will at some point "hang it up" because they just simply have had enough. However Paul understood that such a battle was essentially an illusion. A "distraction" from the real fight. The real battle is not here in the physical realm, nor is our fight with physical and earthly weapons. The real war is hidden behind the spiritual curtain, just beyond our sphere of perception. It is actually there that the battle lines are drawn and our physical world is moved. This is a truth that we need to be reminded of again and again.

We must be reminded that ours is not a battle of politics and intellect, any more than it is one of guns and swords! Again, our fight actually occurs just beyond the realm of human perception in the unseen areas of prayer, spiritual intercession, and faith. That does not mean that there will not be external fights. But victory in them rarely if ever benefit the kingdom or even the victor.

Mankind has tried many times throughout history to fight the gospel battle on the physical plane through politics, legislation, and even at the end of a gun. Yet clearly such efforts have always failed! No one comes to Christ through any other path than that of the Cross and all that it entails. Only the manifestations of the Cross will further God's kingdom: faith, prayer, and obedience. Only a clear modeling of authentic Christianity has ever moved the ball down the field.

### 10:6

Paul seemed emboldened now and ready to deal with the problems that remained within the Corinthian fellowship. He seemed ready to handle them with a lamp of love or with a stick, and the choice was really up to them! But he seemed intent on not just defending his name, but defending the true sheep that walked the halls of the Corinthian church.

Certainly there might be those, *in light of Paul's last words concerning the weapons not being carnal*, who think he is talking out of both sides of his mouth. But there is a vast chasm between those who wholly *reject* Christ, and those within the church family who claim to be a part of Him but in truth are not. With such a claim, there is a grand responsibility and accountability, just as is in any family! Jesus...yes even God the Father, meted out special judgement upon those who brazenly took upon themselves the mantle of Christendom and then misrepresented it, or worse, ultimately did damage to it. Paul was ready now to deal with the corruption *in the church body*, not that which was outside. 1Peter 4:17 "*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God...*"

For the seeker, *the individual who has yet to make a decision for Christ*, Paul was gentle and patient as was Christ, and as should I be as pastor. But for those who claimed to be part of the family of God, Paul intended to hold them accountable. Romans 14:12 says "*Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.*" Paul knew that there would be those who would reject his authority and position, but he remained unfazed and was determined to stay at his post.

Verse 6 seems to allude that perhaps Paul had grabbed an angry cat by the tail. The backlash that would be forthcoming would perhaps be as great as the initial pain received at their hand, but Paul was not going to cower in a corner. He was going to do his job. As loving and gentle as possible, but not at the expense of avoidance. If he was like me at all, he would indeed struggle with the weight of such a responsibility ...

### 10:7

Paul herein was essentially asking the believers in Corinth to "face the facts." They were being asked to think with some depth on this matter and to deal with this issue with clarity and maturity. However in order to do that, there must be a fundamental understanding of the body of Christ, the family of God, and its God ordained design. Please note that this does not designate the pastor as king, but the family of God is not to be a communistic entity either, despite all our modern unbiblical attempts to make it so. All those who believe

themselves to a part of a specific family need to look beyond themselves and grasp the larger picture of God's design.

### **10:8-9**

Certainly it is natural for man to resent authority. But that does not stop Paul from asking them to rise above the natural man! The fact is, we tend to buck our parental authority, marital authority, governmental authority, and yes, even church and pastoral authority if given opportunity. Again, Paul was not seeking some sort of mandate over the church. The pastor, however, is not to be led by the sheep. He is the under-shepherd and is to lead the sheep through every aspect of his life. If He is biblically not worthy of such, then best find another church where you can follow, because *not* following is *not* a biblical option.

The pastor is to oversee the flock God has placed in his care. It is a biblical mandate that is ironically often ignored by churches and pastors alike today. Let's face it, it is indeed just easier for all of us to ignore it! And yes, Paul seemed to be as uncomfortable with this subject as I am. Certainly, this all can be seen as self-serving, but for me I know that ignoring this passage would be far easier than obeying it for both sheep *and* shepherd alike! But we must know that the authority God gave Paul, and the authority he was declaring before them was certainly not for *his* benefit or gain, but for *their* benefit, for **their** blessing and growth. Because in the flesh, I have to tell you that the fight is not worth the potential gain!

Many will claim they adhere only to the "authority of Christ" and need no man over them. Yet let us acknowledge that such an idea is not God's plan nor the teaching of scripture, as God has chosen to speak through men, however imperfect that plan might be. Throughout the Word, God has used men to lead His church, preach His gospel, and disciple His flock.

Paul was not trying to scare them. Indeed he **was** trying to be straight and firm, yet still deal with these believers as brothers and sisters, not as subservient to his position.

### **10:10**

Paul's distracters argued that he lacked the charisma and preaching ability they felt a pastor should possess. Apparently they thought they knew what a leader should be. One with strength, boldness, and a spiritual "sparkle." Well...*at least until they were on the receiving end of such!* These folks, like so many that followed, wanted boldness and strength in their pastor, as long as it is not directed at them personally. They saw those aspects of Paul in his letters, but in person they were not so impressed.

We can think such criticism was easily deflected by Paul, but when we read his writings we know that it hurt. I can speak first-hand about that. There is a wide held belief that pastors aren't really human so it doesn't matter what is done to them.

### **10:11**

Clearly Paul could not be both ways. If they wanted strength, they would have to let him be strong. Ultimately, they would be the deciding factor on that account. If they wanted a man of God, then they had to respect him as their pastor even when he corrected them. When he did correct them, he did so out of love and an obligation to his calling.

It appears that Paul was now physically coming to them. They would have to decide how they would receive him. Would they receive him as God's messenger, or simply a puppet on which they could pull the strings?

### **10:12**

Apparently there were those at Corinth who thought themselves to be the "standard." In light of that, Paul's tone changes to one of irony and cynicism here. It's easy to think we have somehow arrived spiritually when we only look around at those of our immediate group. But they aren't the measuring stick we are to use in such matters.

Christ is the standard. He is *always* the standard! It's easy to find someone less spiritual than ourselves, who naturally makes us feel we are doing fine or that we are spiritual giants.

Paul was not just going after the specific individuals who were messing with the Corinthian believers' heads. No, it was about more than just the ringleader. In order for such a person to have an effect, he or she has to have followers. So Paul was going for them all at once. Whenever such a person rears his head, he is sure to gather supporters around him, which is why Paul deals with it in this way. Especially if it is a relative or member of one's blood family. Yet some of the greatest lies I have ever heard was actually between family members!

### **10:13**

Paul was not going to claim credit for ministry he had no part in, nor was he going to attempt to infringe upon another's work. Certainly such consideration is ignored today as church growth methodology has degraded to simple methods of stealing from one church to build another. Just wave a bigger ice cream cone and they come running! So in our day we have the big shuffle going on: a religious version of musical chairs.

Churches entice believers with worldly amenities: great bands, new church buildings with all the earthly comforts, state of the art sound systems, entertaining youth groups, and new age child care. Sadly as we approach the end days, we will see a further exodus from focus upon biblical teaching and serving the Lord, in exchange for more and more of a "gimme" attitude, and the churches who will supply it.

But *Paul's* "prize" was these believers! They were **his** area of boasting. Not just because they went to *his* church, but because they had become disciples, servants, and faithful saints. His was proud of them as I am of you.

### **10:14-16**

Paul was facing down these people who had come into his sphere of ministry and, through lies, insinuations, and worldly enticements, had begun to draw the believers away from him and ultimately away from the truth of the Word of God. Clearly it has always been easier to steal something rather than earn it, that's no secret!

Paul hoped, as I do as a pastor, that as the people's faith grew, as they matured in the Word and the Spirit, that their love and support of him as their pastor would also grow. Under that unity, they all would go on to preach the gospel, to do the work of the kingdom in lands beyond their immediate world.

Paul knew what he had been called to do as a man, as a pastor, and as a church fellowship. He was not just wandering around aimlessly in ministry. He had purpose and vision, for without vision the people perish. (Prov 29:18) He, *like myself*, likely knew the words in Zechariah to the high priest Joshua where God told him "*If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.*"

### **10:17-18**

These guys had tried to steal Paul's sheep, assassinated his character, contradicted his teaching, and assume a false authority. The question that Paul's critics should answer is this: has the Lord so commended you that you can witness blessing in your ministry ...souls have been saved, ... saints have been established in the faith, and churches have been planted?

Paul was letting the fruit of his work...the converts in his fellowship, speak as to his righteous place as pastor. His proof was right there in Corinth, and he gave all of the glory to God.

**Rom 15:17-18** "*So it is right for me to be enthusiastic about all Christ Jesus has done through me in my service to God. I dare not boast of anything else. I have brought the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I lived before them.*"

Paul, back in verse 4, spoke of “weapons of our warfare.” Perhaps that message was lost in the text or moreover in today’s message. But Paul understood that the greatest war we will fight in and for our faith is not “*out there.*” It is inside the hearts and souls of each of us. The greatest battle ground is and always has been inside of us.

In his Book “Rise of Christianity,” the author Rodney Stark, said this: “*Christianity did not grow because of a miracle working in the marketplaces...or because Constantine (the emperor) said it should, or even because the martyrs gave it such credibility. It grew because Christians constituted an intense community, able to generate the “invincible obstinacy” that so offended the younger Pliny (Roman governor who persecuted Christians) but yielded immense religious rewards. And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the “good news.”*