

The Book of 2nd Corinthians

Chapter 10:1-18

March 7, 1999

- **Outline of 2nd Corinthians:**

- Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
- Chapter 2 Restore fellowship to the repentant; One aroma, two response.
- Chapter 3 The glorious covenants
- Chapter 4 The Light of the Glory of Christ
- Chapter 5 Longing to be further clothed; Christ died for the world
- Chapter 6 Faithfulness in persecution; Separation from the World
- Chapter 7 Godly sorrow leads to repentance.
- Chapter 8 Gracious giving abounds from grace received.
- Chapter 9 Sparse sowing yields sparse reaping.
- Chapter 10 Weapons of war; Spheres of authority.

- **Review & Introduction**

To this point it is easy to divide this book up into at least two sections. The first section would consist of chapters 1 through 7 where Paul is giving a defense of himself and in that discussion hits on a number of broad important topics. The second section would then be chapters 8 & 9 where Paul addresses the collection to be gathered in the church for the relief of the brethren afflicted by a famine in Jerusalem. This chapter marks the third and last major section of the book where Paul writes a polemic against the false teachers who were influencing the church at Corinth by heretical teaching and their attempts to undermine the authenticity and creditability of Paul as an Apostle.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 10:1 - 18**

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.

- It is very instructional to see how Paul combines meekness and gentleness with polemical writing. Somehow, the church has bought in to the lie that it is wrong to say that something/someone is wrong. But if we were to remove the polemics that are included in just the new testament, we would lose books like Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Peter, Jude and 2 Corinthians and much of the teaching of our Lord.
- Clearly, we know that the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood or the ability to identify error is a function of maturity. But equally as a sign of maturity is combining with that ability the attribute of meekness and gentleness. Lowliness is not inconsistent with distinguishing falsehood.
- Paul was encouraging the church at Corinth to be meek and gentle but simultaneously bold and confident toward the false teachers in their midst so that Paul would not need to be when he arrived. Paul was longing for peaceful fellowship with the Corinthians but before there can be peace there must be a battle waged against the heresy. Too many times we are lured into the trap that says that we should not confront so that we can keep the peace. But, toleration of heresy is a guarantee that peace will never occur.

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.

- Paul is not speaking against the war or against Christians being engaged in the war, he is speaking against Christians engaging in the war while using the weapons of the world. We get lulled into thinking that we all have the same weapons and whoever is better at wielding them will win the war. This is why the Church is so anemic. Our weapons have divine power to obviate objection, and destroy everything that sets itself against the knowledge of God.
- What weapons is Paul speaking of? The Gospel, the Scriptures (the knowledge of God), the fruits of the Spirit and the promises of God. When we fail as students of these weapons we ensure our failure in the war. It is as if the church had been given atomic weapons but we somehow decided to use the sticks and stones with which the world fights.
- Notice also that there are two kinds of thoughts (about anything), those that have been brought to the obedience of Christ and those that have not. The way we think about everything consists of these two kinds of thoughts. Are our thoughts about daily things obedient or disobedient?

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.

- The first application that Paul makes about thinking carnally versus thinking spiritually is in regard to the accusations made by the opponents of Paul. The accusations included remarks that Paul was only strong in writing but was weak in personal presentation. Paul's warning here is that he is able and willing to be equally as bold in person as he is in his letters. What strength does this threat carry? Paul had been given the city of Corinth by the Lord for the purpose of nurturing and ministering to it. As such, he was in a position to instruct and rebuke them in spiritual matters. He also had the authority to put them outside of the Church.

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.

- The opponents of Paul had no basis other than themselves for commending themselves to the church at Corinth. They had not labored for them nor been given authority to nurture the church. They employed a circular authority whereby they self-authenticated their ability to authenticate.
- Should we ever compare ourselves? What should we compare ourselves to? Paul urges us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith; what standard would we use for the examination? The Word of God is our only ultimate and infallible source of truth for faith and practice. While it may be helpful to consider other Christians to see how they are conducting themselves and be spurred on to further good works, even our evaluation of other Christians is done in accordance with the Scriptures.

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. NKJV

- God has established His church and the world in such a way that the labor is accomplished by people doing so by faith. God knows the fruits of each man's labor and does not blur the distinctions of whose fruit is the product of whose labor. When we stand before Him in the judgement of all believers, we will stand there with *our* labors and fruit—not the labor and fruit of another.
- God has seen fit to establish His church with elders who are given to rule and serve congregations of saints. These men called Elders who serve these congregations will give an account for the souls in those churches. These are the men whom God holds accountable for the affairs of their respective churches. The opponents of Paul did not have the history with the church at Corinth like he did and they were trouble makers seeking to fill their bellies rather than see the kingdom of God expanded.
- This is a good example of the reason why the CRE has not given great authority to the Presbytery or the Council. The primary authority rests with the local board of Elders (called a Session), that is, with those men whom God will demand an accounting.