

## 2 Corinthians 10

- 1) Paul uses a confusing construction in 10:2. In light of 1:17 and 5:16, what does he mean by “human standards,” and what accusation is Paul defending against?
- 2) Are there any clues to tell us whether Paul’s defense is aimed at the super apostles, the minority supporting them, or the Corinthian church as a whole?
- 3) Paul might have commanded them, as both an apostle approved by Jerusalem and the founder of their church, to reject the false apostles. Instead he writes, “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you” (10:1). Why?
- 4) Paul writes in 10:3-5,

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We **demolish arguments** and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we **take captive every thought** to make it obedient to Christ.

The “arguments” in 10:5 are “their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God” (Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity*, 57). We’ve inferred that the false apostles were Hellenistic Jews for whom ecstatic spiritual experiences had produced an attitude of triumphalism. They were better trained in the forceful rhetoric of the day (11:6) and unlike Paul charged for support (11:7). List some of the arguments and thoughts the Corinthians need to overcome.

- 5) Carson sees in the “weapons” of 10:4 those given in Eph 6:13-18: the truth of the gospel, prayer, eagerness to spread the gospel, the Word of God, faith, and salvation (Carson, 61). Read and discuss Carson, pp. 62-62.
- 6) The actors in 2 Corinthians include God, Paul and his team (Timothy, Titus), the majority in Corinth who support him and the minority who don’t, and their leaders, the “super apostles” (12:11) ... and Satan. Paul says in 2:11, “...we [forgive others] so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs,” and in 4:4, “... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (see also 1 John 5:19). Paul even refers to his “thorn in the flesh” as a “messenger of Satan” (12:7). It is not surprising, then, that Satan appears in Calvin’s comments on 10:4:

The life of a Christian, it is true, is a perpetual warfare, for whoever gives himself to the service of God will have no truce from Satan at any time, but will be harassed with incessant inquietude. It becomes, however, ministers of the word and pastors to be standard-bearers, going before the others; and, certainly, there are none that Satan harasses more, that are more severely assaulted, or that sustain more numerous or more dreadful onsets. That man, therefore, is mistaken, who girds himself for the discharge of this office, and is not at the same time furnished with courage and bravery for contending; for he is not exercised otherwise than in fighting. For we must take this into account, that the gospel is like a fire, by which the fury of Satan is enkindled...

But by what weapons is he to be repelled? It is only by spiritual weapons that he can be repelled. Whoever, therefore, is unarmed with the influence of the Holy Spirit, however he may boast that he is a minister of Christ, will nevertheless, not prove himself to be such. At the same time, if you would have a full enumeration of spiritual weapons, doctrine must be conjoined with zeal, and a good conscience with the efficacy of the Spirit, and with other necessary graces.

- a) We've already noted that Paul uses language used elsewhere of spiritual warfare (3-4; cf. Eph 6:12), suggesting that the "weapons" are those of spiritual warfare. How is this different from simply pursuing Christian maturity? If this is spiritual warfare, how does it matter that there's an enemy?<sup>1</sup>
  - b) Is Calvin right that it is particularly when the gospel is advanced that Satan resists (and the age-old corollary for leaders: if you want to avoid spiritual attack, sit back and let the church care for itself)?
- 7) In this passage, Paul alternately begs (v. 1-2, "I appeal to you", "I ask that") and threatens (v. 6, 11, "We are ready to punish", "what we say by letter... we will also do when present") and is even sarcastic/ironic (v. 12, "We dare not classify..."). While it's true that this is in keeping with standard rhetorical practice of the time (Keener, BW3), Paul is clearly pulling out all the stops.

Earlier we read that Paul actually left a fertile field for the gospel in Troas (2:12-13) because he was so distracted by worry for Titus. Yet here he is unwilling to let go because of his love for the Corinthians (11:11) and concern for those in Achaia he hopes to reach using Corinth as a base (10:15-16).

Have you ever been in a church where a crisis, acute or ongoing, led a pastor or elder board to use such strong rhetoric? Can you think of cases where they should have, but didn't?

- 8) Falling prey to the lies of the enemy (the father of lies) and the world can rob us of strength and vision. We may distrust God and doubt his love for us. We may doubt the relevance of the kingdom, so distant compared to other concerns. We may believe change and growth in the church are so unlikely and challenging as to be impossible. We may believe ourselves alone, and without resources in battling the sins we have wrestled with all these many years. (Are you feeling robbed of strength and vision yet?)

What lies do you catch yourself drawn to?

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*Fun fact:* The KJV has inspired the lyrics of more pop songs than any other book. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2011/51/pop-goes-the-bible.html>).

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<sup>1</sup> Put differently: Is there any reason to tell your kids about Satan, or can you just tell them how to live as Christians?

## Leader's Introduction:

When during his previous visit things went horribly wrong, Paul left. He later sent a strongly worded letter and is not being accused of being a wimp: bold in print, unimpressive in person. (*Tapeinos* in 10:1, translated "humble" in the NRSV, could mean base and servile, though when applied to a king it meant the "meek" king was merciful.) Since his last visit, other so-called apostles have arrived and are stoking the fire. The one piece of good news is Titus' report that the majority of the Corinthians were willing to discipline the man who'd caused trouble during Paul's last visit. Now Paul writes this letter to address the minority and their false apostles.

This final section of the letter, the last four chapters, is particularly interesting because the situation's so difficult. Carson says of this section, "these chapters are among the most emotionally intense of all that the apostle Paul wrote" and they "most clearly reveal the heart and mind of the apostle Paul." (*A Model for Christian Maturity*, pp. 13-14). It's at times like this when true priorities are made clear. If the pastoral letters are Leadership 101, this is the graduate class: how to persuade and motivate a divided congregation which doubts your authority and is in danger of turning from the true gospel – and how to do it from afar when wolves in sheep clothing are on the scene poisoning the group against you.