

We are now better situated to think more closely about how this text speaks to contemporary evangelicalism, especially Western evangelicalism. At the risk of considerable oversimplification, we may divide that evangelicalism into two groups. *Group One* is relatively placid. It goes through the accepted motions, is basically faithful (esp. in formal matters), but knows little of the power of the gospel. *Group Two* is aggressive, active, triumphant. Not a little of the American can-do mentality is mixed in with it. It gains a substantial hearing, expects to see victory and joy in its followers, and harnesses enormous energy and many skills to the task of promoting its understanding of the gospel.

This is quite clearly a caricature. There are many Christians who fit neither group. Nevertheless the model embraces large blocks of Western Christianity, and it is worth pausing to ask what impact the text ought to make on such groups.

In its most virulent forms, *Group Two* suffers from an over-realized eschatology—just as the Corinthians did. *Group Two* Christians so magnify the many promises of God for health, prosperity, and victory that they reflect little on what the Bible also says about suffering, persecution, steadfastness in defeat, and death. Deeply, if unwittingly, influenced by the materialism around us and by the American ideal of the classic success story, they transfer such models into the church, and, ignorant of both church history and the balance of Scripture, they lay themselves open to teachers whose grasp of the biblical gospel is badly skewed. I shall say more about these things later and provide more concrete examples; but already, even from the verses at hand (esp. 2 Cor. 10:3–5), it is important to call attention to such tragic features as self-promotion in Christian leadership, and to a profound dependence on psychological manipulation, mass circulation of glib how-to formulas for instant spiritual maturity and material prosperity, and a frank appeal to endless self-interest, that such features as principal daily death to self-interest (= taking up one's cross and following the Lord Jesus Christ), maturity stimulated by suffering (= God's grace is made perfect in weakness), and the abolition of doubtful, manipulative techniques (= rejection of a style of proclamation that is nothing more than wise and persuasive words, 1 Cor. 2:4) and ignored or buried in the deluge of success stories.

Meanwhile, *Group One* avoids the triumphalism of *Group Two* and sometimes criticizes *Group Two*, but instead of wielding Paul's powerful, divine weapons, the members of this camp go through formal motions of religion, adhere to orthodox confessions, expect little of real blessing or joy in the Lord, and experience even less of the same.

The result is that both *Group One* and *Group Two*, if for very different reasons, shy away from the weapons Paul recommends, and to the extent that we belong to either group, we discover as a result, if we are honest in our self-criticism, that our weapons lack divine power to demolish the strongholds that interest Paul. Why is there a rising number of "evangelicals" without a corresponding swell of God-centered worship, repentance, unfeigned faith, humility, righteousness? Of course, there are many exceptions, many individual Christians who have truly been transformed by the grace of God; but their numbers fall so far short of those who think of themselves as evangelical Christians that we must ask if some forms of evangelicalism are falling progressively out of step with the Scriptures on such points as these.

I shall cast the matter in a more positive light. One of the things we badly need in Western Christianity is a return to the balance of Paul. On the one hand, we must recognize we live in a world: some eschatological blessings will ordinarily be withheld from us until the consummation. At the same time, although the weapons for spiritual warfare God has given us are divinely powerful, they are bound up with the very nature of this "foolish" gospel we proclaim. Argue a skeptic into a corner, and you will not take his mind captive for Christ, but pray for him, proclaim the gospel to him, live out the gospel of peace, walk righteously by faith until he senses your ultimate allegiance and citizenship are vastly different from his own, and you may discover that the power of truth, the convicting and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and the glories of Christ Jesus shatter his reasons and demolish his arguments until you take captive his mind and heart to make them obedient to Christ. The result will be a life transformed. Gone will be the principal egocentricity, the self-proclaimed independence. Replacing it will be a cheerful and devoted submission to the lordship of Christ. Only the weapons Paul advocates are sufficient to accomplish so stupendous a task.