

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

II COR. 10:1 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:

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.

3 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;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again,

that, as he *is* Christ's, even so *are* we Christ's.

8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

10 For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.

11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *will we be* also in deed when we are present.

12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

17 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

NOTES

Spiritual Weapons

Lesson Text: II Corinthians 10:1-12, 17-18

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 2:1-16; Ephesians 6:10-18

TIME: probably A.D. 56

PLACE: from Macedonia

GOLDEN TEXT—"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:5).

Lesson Exposition

GENTLE AND BOLD IN CHRIST— II Cor. 10:1-6

Paul's entreaty (II Cor. 10:1). Paul beseeches, or begs, the Corinthians to continue to pay close attention to his letter, especially to what he is about to say. There were certainly other things he would rather have discussed with them (cf. I Cor. 3:1-2), but he continually had to assert his apostolic authority in Christ as a basis for his entreaty.

The Corinthians did not seem to take Paul's authority very seriously. They accused him of being tough in his letters but timid when he was with them. In other words, they thought he was all talk and no action. Some claimed that when he was away from them, he was a big, bad tough guy, but when he was face to face with them, he backed down.

Paul's stand (II Cor. 10:2). It had never been Paul's aim or ambition as an apostle to throw his weight around. In fact, he tried every way possible not to do that. But even after much correspondence, many Corinthians still doubted him. Just like Christ, Paul would be humble when the situation required it, but he would also be

bold when the credibility of the gospel was at risk.

Paul's weapons (II Cor. 10:3-4). Paul understood that his battle was not with the Corinthians, but with Satan. His enemy was not the Corinthian people, but the devil. The Corinthians were but a tool in the hands of Satan, and Paul recognized this. His battle was spiritual, not of the flesh.

The weapons we use as Christians include prayer, the Bible, faith in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit who resides in us.

Paul's polemics (II Cor. 10:5-6). Paul always had to stand ready to give a defense of the gospel wherever he went and to whomever he met. He confronted a lot of bad ideology everywhere he went, so he had to be ready to tear down erroneous arguments in order to give a clear presentation of the gospel. Two very important tools for Christians to use in personal evangelism are polemics and apologetics. Polemics is the practice of exposing the error of false religions and ideas. Apologetics, on the other hand, is concerned with offering a vindication of the gospel and Christian doctrine.

CONFIDENT IN CHRIST—

II Cor. 10:7-12

Power in the gospel (II Cor. 10:7-8). The truth of Paul's message as well as the validity of his ministry was not something that was hidden from the Corinthians. He was not secretive in his message or his motives. He was there to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and was sent by Jesus as an apostle.

Power unexpected (II Cor. 10:9-10). The intent of Paul's written correspondence was not to frighten or intimidate the Corinthians. While at times giving sharp correction for inappropriate or sinful behavior, Paul's purpose in writing was not to be overly critical or abusive in any way.

Power in integrity (II Cor. 10:11-12). Paul had news for those who charged that he was different when he was with them than he was when he was on the road. There was no difference in his conduct either way. While he was away, the only way he could communicate with the Corinthians was through letters, but when he was with them, he could communicate both through words and actions, which are more potent. He wanted the Corinthians to perceive his integrity so they would know that he was trustworthy.

BOASTING IN CHRIST—

II Cor. 10:17-18

Boasting in vain (II Cor. 10:17). Paul thought it wrong and misguided for a person to boast in himself, because we have nothing good in us apart from God. Even those who are highly intelligent among unbelievers receive their abilities from God.

Boasting in Christ (II Cor. 10:18). The only thing any of us have to boast about is what Christ has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. We can do nothing of eternal value without Him (cf. John 15:5).

When a carpenter builds a beau-

tiful house, does his hammer get the glory? Of course not. That would be downright absurd. The carpenter is the one who gets the praise and attention. The tool was just something that he used. While tools are important, it is the maker's hands that did the work.

The same is true for us. We are tools in the hands of God to be used at His pleasure and discretion. Thankfully, He also looks on us lovingly as sons and daughters, but we still have no reason to boast in ourselves as if we could do anything apart from Him.

The Lord will commend those who trust in Him. God is satisfied with those who love Him, and they will know His pleasure for all eternity.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the basis of Paul's entreaty to the Corinthians?
2. Why did the Corinthians fail to take Paul's authority seriously?
3. What key truth did Paul understand about the conflict between him and the Corinthians?
4. What are some of the weapons we need to use in battling against Satan?
5. What are two important tools in personal evangelism?
6. What was Paul's motivation in going to Corinth?
7. What did Paul want the Corinthians to perceive about him?
8. Why did Paul think it was wrong for anyone to boast in themselves?
9. What is the only thing for us to boast about?
10. Who will receive commendation from the Lord?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Holy Spirit leads His people to be bold at times (II Cor. 10:1-2).
2. Believers invite failure when they attack spiritual problems with mere human wisdom (vss. 3-5).
3. Victory in Christ is won through obedient submission to Him (vs. 6).
4. God gives spiritual authority to people for building others up, not for intimidating them or oppressing them (vss. 7-9).
5. Be careful about criticizing other Christians; it displeases the Lord and invites Him to teach you humility (vss. 10-11).
6. People who blow their own horns cannot avoid playing a sour and discordant music (vs. 12).
7. We have nothing to boast about ourselves; all that we are is by the grace of God in Christ (vss. 17-18).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. In what situations might a Christian need to take a more gentle approach?
2. Why must believers always be mindful of being involved in spiritual warfare?
3. What weapons are Christians to use in spiritual battles?
4. What happens when Christians lose sight of the true identity of their spiritual enemy?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5).

Paul lays out his spiritual warfare strategy. First, the battle involves tearing down “imagination,” those proud thoughts that do not come from the Holy Spirit. Paul would attack criticisms with the Word of God, not his own human reasoning.

Next, his spiritual warfare is aimed at demolishing “every high thing”: arrogant human wisdom and philosophies that set themselves against the revealed knowledge of God. Finally, believers are to take their thoughts “captive” to the obedience of Christ. The term alludes to the practice of ancient conquerors leading a procession of their prisoners of war in chains through the streets upon their return from a great victory.

Though this language is all rather militant, Paul reminds his readers that Christians do not wage war as others do. We do not retaliate in kind against our attackers. We cannot control what others do to us, so our battle is within our own hearts. We are to be renewed inwardly, not submitting to the flesh and its lusts, but to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ. We are to give our conflicts to the Lord, even as He works to mold us into the image of His Son.

Paul admitted that he was unimpressive in person, but his fruitful work at Corinth proved that God worked through him.

—Mark Winter.