

Every Thought Obedient to Christ

2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15

Key Verse: 10:5

“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.”

In chapters 10-12, Paul defends his apostleship. Some false apostles were discrediting Paul in an attempt to hijack the Corinthian church for their own gain. Paul was compelled to help the Corinthians hold on to gospel faith for the glory of Christ and their own salvation. So he defended his apostleship. In doing so, Paul fights like a spiritual general against the forces of evil. There are many kinds of warfare: military conflicts between nations, psychological warfare, economic warfare, political warfare, internet warfare, and domestic warfare between husband and wife, and so on. However, we can categorize warfare into two kinds: worldly warfare and spiritual warfare. Paul engages in spiritual warfare. Paul tells what kinds of weapons he fights with, what the target is, and how to discern the true nature of spiritual conflict. May God give us spiritual discernment and equip us to engage in this spiritual warfare and win the victory.

I. Weapons of spiritual warfare (10:1-6)

Look at verse 1. "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you--I, Paul, who am 'timid' when face to face with you, but 'bold' when away!" Paul had served God's flock with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He did not raise his voice or exercise authority harshly, but was compassionate and tender like a mother. So he was misunderstood. Some criticized him for being 'timid' in face to face meetings while 'bold' when writing letters from a distance. Verse 10 says, "For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speech amounts to nothing.'" They saw Paul from a human point of view, not God's point of view. They did not know how much Paul struggled to imitate the meekness and gentleness of Christ. In the world, "survival of the fittest" is the rule. The weak and sick and deficient are despised and ignored or crushed. They carry wounds and scars from the oppression of the strong and cannot prosper in this society. However, Jesus, the Son of God, the Almighty Creator, came into the world as a human being. Jesus understood our weaknesses and embraced us with compassion. Jesus healed the sick and bound up the brokenhearted. Jesus did not come to condemn sinners who are weak and helpless; Jesus came to save sinners (Jn 3:17). Finally Jesus went to the cross and died to forgive all of our sins and to give us a new life. Matthew said about Jesus, "A bruised reed he will not break,

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and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory" (Mt 12:20). Jesus invited the weary and burdened to find rest in him (Mt 11:28-29). However, Jesus was also strong and courageous in dealing with those who opposed the gospel ministry. Once, in rebuking the religious leaders of Israel, Jesus said, "You snakes! You brood of vipers!" (Mt 23:33a)

Paul wanted to imitate Jesus. In the past Paul had been a Pharisee who was strong and legalistic. He was far from being gentle and meek. But after meeting the Risen Christ he began to imitate Christ. Paul said in Philippians 2:5-8, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!" In a miracle of God's grace, Paul became gentle and meek, so much so that he was misunderstood. On the other hand, when Paul fought against God's enemies he was like a prowling lion, ready to pounce on the prey (Ac 13:7-11). In this way Paul was meek and gentle, while also being courageous and bold. In fact, Paul was concerned that he might have to be bolder than he wanted to be when he visited the Corinthians.

Some people, whose minds were worldly, misunderstood Paul (2). They thought that Paul was a coward who was threatening in his letters from a distance, but timid in person. Paul hoped that they would correct their attitude before he arrived. If not, he was prepared to be decisive and bold in dealing with them. In fact, Paul was ready to wage war. He seemed somewhat like President Teddy Roosevelt, whose motto was, "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." However, Paul would not wage war the way the world does (3). Paul would engage in spiritual warfare. Paul knew that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). In verses 4-6 Paul explains what the weapons of spiritual warfare are and how to fight.

Look at verse 4. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." Paul contrasts his weapons with the weapons of the world. The weapons of the world are boasting, deception, arguments, pretension, self-righteousness, a rebellious spirit and a disobedient heart. The root of all these is pride that exalts oneself to dominate others, tear them down and enslave them. That is why Augustine said that pride is the root of man's sin. Romans 1:21a says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...." On the other hand, Paul's spiritual weapons were dependence on God (4), the truth of God (11:7,10; 13:8),

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love for others that built them up (5:14; 10:8; 11:11; 13:10), and sacrifice in order to serve others (11:7). Underlying all of these was humility (10:1, 13, 17-18). This humility was derived from Jesus (Php 2:5-8). Once Augustine was asked what were the qualifications to be God's servant. He answered, "First is humbleness; second is humbleness; third is humbleness." Proud people try to live without God. They build up their own ideas which are against the knowledge of God, such as theories of evolution that deny God's existence, or a redefinition of human identity and sexuality that pervert God's creation order. They are disobedient to God. They argue against God's truth. They try to build up strongholds from which they can spread their ideas throughout the world. If one is caught by their forces, he or she cannot get out of it by their own power. However, Paul said that his weapons "have divine power to demolish strongholds" (4b).

Let's read verse 5. "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." Paul helped people to repent of their pride and selfishness and to surrender their lives to Christ. Paul helped them to get rid of their rebellious spirit and to be submissive to Christ's Lordship. Paul helped them to repent of their disobedient heart and to have an obedient heart toward Christ's words so that they would make every thought obedient to Christ. How could such a work be done? One must be equipped with God's weapons. In his epistle to the Ephesians (6:14-18), Paul described this spiritual armor: "...the belt of truth...the breastplate of righteousness...the gospel of peace...the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation..." as well as two offensive weapons: "the sword of the Spirit...and to pray..." Our weapons are not missiles or atomic bombs, but the gospel truth--the word of God--and prayer. The gospel truth is the most powerful weapon of all. We should be equipped with gospel truth so that we can demolish everything that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and win the victory. In verse 6 Paul clearly said that those who remained disobedient would be punished.

II. Targets in spiritual warfare (10:7-11:15)

In part 1, Paul talked about the principle and weapons of spiritual warfare. In part 2, Paul explains which targets we should hit.

First, boasting (7-18). Some people criticized Paul based on their own superficial view, saying that Paul tried to frighten them with his authority as an apostle. They claimed that they belonged to Christ, so they had superior spirituality (1 Cor 1:12). This was the influence of false teachers (11:23). It was a sneaky form of rebellion by which they could avoid Paul's spiritual authority. Look at verse 8. "For even if I

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boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it." They did not need to feel threatened by spiritual authority; rather they should regard it as a blessing by which they could be built up and become strong. Still, some wanted to ignore Paul's letters, saying that he was really weak and unimpressive (10). Paul assured them that he would be the same in person as he was in his letters (11).

In verses 12-18 Paul contrasts his boasting with the boasting of the false apostles. The false apostles boasted according to their own standard and for their own glory; in fact, it was groundless (12). Furthermore, their boasting went beyond proper limits. They claimed credit for work done by others. At the root, they boasted out of their pride, without any real contents. Pride is to think of oneself too highly. So Paul said in Romans 12:3, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." We can see this sober judgment in Paul's boasting. Paul confined his boasting to the field God assigned to him and he did not go beyond proper limits. Nor did he boast of work done by others. His only hope was that as their faith continued to grow his area of activity among them would greatly expand. Finally, he gave a principle in regard to boasting. Look at verses 17-18. "But 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.' For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." Paul knew that he had nothing good in himself. But he could not deny that God had done mighty work in and through him. So he boasted about what God had done to glorify God and encourage others.

People boast about themselves a lot. They are proud of what they have and what they are doing. They boast about their education, children, children's education, social popularity, beauty or handsomeness, eloquence in speech, ipod, sports team, and so on and so forth. The contents of most conversations is self-boasting. These conversations begin with "I" and end with "me." And in between is "my" and "mine." In summary, it is "I, my, me." However, our conversations should begin with "our Lord Jesus Christ," and end with "Thank God." In between we should tell how God has used us in spite of our sins and shortcomings. Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells what we should boast about. It says, "This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the LORD." We should boast about the Creator God and his beautiful character. We should boast about our Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on the cross and died for us, and about his

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great humility, gentleness, mercy and compassion. We should boast about the work of the Holy Spirit who moves in power and wisdom to do mighty and wonderful things. Our Lord God is worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise, now and forever. Amen!

Second, a different gospel (11:1-15). Paul explained his inner motive in verse 2. It says, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." Paul loved the Corinthians very much, not in a self-centered way but with God's love. So he wanted them to be united to Christ, their true husband. He wanted them to be like pure virgins who were fully devoted to Christ, and Christ alone. Paul did not lead them to himself, but to Jesus Christ. Paul knew that only Christ could give them eternal blessings. However, Satan wanted to lead them astray through false apostles. Look at verse 4. "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough." The false apostles used the words "Jesus" and "gospel," but they gave them a completely different meaning than what is written in the Bible. The Corinthians had failed to discern their spiritual error and the danger they were being led into.

Paul emphasized that the Corinthians and we must believe "the Jesus" of the Bible and "the gospel" of the Bible. The Bible says there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). There is only one way to come to God; it is through Jesus Christ. So Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). No one can solve our sin and death problem except Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose again. Jesus Christ is the unique Savior who rescues us from the dominion of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of light. This is the gospel.

There is only one Savior: Jesus Christ. But there have been many different gospels, such as Gnosticism and cults derived from Christianity. These days we see "new age" religions, secular humanism, materialism, salvation through science, as well as Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Bahai and so on. Through the serpent's cunning, one can be led astray from the true Savior Jesus Christ and from devotion to him (3). False apostles appear to be somebody and they speak eloquently. But they lead people to false hope and finally to destruction. Their goal is to exploit foolish people for financial gain. We must discern the difference between "a Jesus" and "the Jesus," and "a gospel" and "the gospel," so that we may not be led astray from

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sincere devotion to Christ. We must help others believe "the Jesus" and "the gospel," according to the Bible's teaching.

In verses 7-12 Paul explains why he served the Corinthians free of charge. Ironically, it had become a point on which some people criticized Paul. False apostles claimed that their lectures and counseling was so valuable that people should pay for it and they accepted material support shamelessly. However, Paul taught the gospel free of charge to the Corinthians. When Paul needed something he received help from the Macedonian churches. Paul knew that the Corinthians were not spiritually mature enough to support their shepherd Paul financially. In everything Paul did for the Corinthians, his motive was love of Christ and love for them. So he would continue to serve them as he had.

Paul told the Corinthians plainly that he was not inferior to the super apostles (5). He was not a trained speaker, but he had knowledge of the gospel, which is revealed by God (6). The super apostles had planted doubt about Paul (11). In verses 13-16 Paul exposed who they really were. They were deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. It should not be too surprising, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Though they might have deceived people, they could not produce good fruit. Their end would be what their actions deserved. By their fruit we can recognize who they are.

Through today's passage, we learn that our enemy Satan is working behind the scenes to plant doubt, fear, rebellion, a disobedient spirit and most of all, pride. Then he makes people prisoners in his stronghold. We must hold on to "the gospel" and "the Jesus." We must remember and practice the humility of Christ. When the gospel truth rules our hearts, every thought will be obedient to Christ. Then we can be fully equipped with "the gospel," our powerful spiritual weapon, and preach "the gospel." God will empower us with divine power to demolish Satan's strongholds.

Let's pray to engage in spiritual warfare on each of our campuses by preaching the gospel so that God's kingdom may expand.