

SPIRITUAL WAR ... INSIDE THE CHURCH
2 Corinthians 10:1-18

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away! — ² I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, ⁶ being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

⁷ Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸ For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. ⁹ I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. ¹⁰ For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." ¹¹ Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present. ¹² Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

¹³ But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. We were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. ¹⁵ We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. ¹⁷ "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

One of the most destructive devices of Satan is to get a war started within the local church. Personally I have survived three local church splits and have wondered if it may be me as the source of the troubles. For what it is worth in each instance I stayed with the local church while others left the fellowship.

Rarely do local churches divide over the Gospel. Some peripheral issue comes up and people take sides and our sinful nature allows us to refuse to compromise.

Sometimes the issue is, in fact, important, but not to the extent of the harm that is done when a schism occurs in the local body.

A careful reading of 2 Corinthians will show that in chapters 1-9, Paul uses plural pronouns {we...us...our...} while in chapters 10-13, he uses more singular pronouns {I ... me}. Another shift is in the tone of the letter, from relief and comfort at the report of Titus to sarcasm and reproach aimed at the some of the Corinthians and the false apostles who were causing trouble in the congregation.

Paul identified the trouble-makers as “false apostles” [11:13].

The “super-apostles” [11:5; 12:11], were probably James, Peter, and John who witnessed the transfiguration. Paul is saying that he is not inferior to them as an apostle; the idea is that some were comparing Paul with the “super-apostles.”

Notice how many ways Paul’s ministry was attacked in chapters 10-13:

Paul was accused of being bold when he was safely away from the church [10:1]

They also accused Paul of conducting his life by the standards of the world [10:2].

They accused Paul of trying to intimidate people with his letters while in person he was unimpressive and a poor speaker [10:9-10].

They accused him of moving in on the territory of other leaders [10:15-16].

They said he was inferior to the other apostles because he was unskilled as a speaker [11:5-6] and because his ministry was not proved by apostolic signs, wonders, and miracles [12:11-12].

They insinuated that Paul’s refusal to accept financial support was “unapostolic” and evidence that he did not love them [11:7-11].

Paul was trying to trick them to get more money for the church at Jerusalem [12:14-18].

And they wanted proof that Christ was speaking through Paul [13:3].

Who were these people who attacked Paul in so many ways?

They considered themselves to be Christians [10:7].

But they preached a different gospel [11:4].

They prized oratorical skill [11:6].

They were able to impose their authority over some Corinthians and put them in bondage [11:19-20].

They bragged about their “Jewishness” [11:22].

They claimed to be servants of Christ [11:23].

Apparently they claimed to have visions and revelations from the Lord [12:1].

And they claimed to have done signs, wonders, and miracles [12:11-13].

The result of this opposition was that Paul did not believe that his accusers were true apostles. The message they preached was not the gospel and the Jesus they preached was not the real Jesus and the spirit they offered was not the Holy Spirit.

Their criteria for evaluating an apostle were that he must have excellent speaking skills, a forceful and commanding manner, and perform miracles.

The last four chapters of 2 Corinthians are Paul’s defense of his ministry. But really Paul is not defending himself; rather he is speaking in the sight of God for their up-building [12:19]. The false apostles tried to get people under their authority by enslaving them through intimidation [11:20]. True Christian leadership is defined by Jesus;

Matt 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." ²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In the spirit of Christ, Paul did not demand to be recognized in his rightful authority as an apostle but he “entreated” them to respond voluntarily [10:1].

Paul uses two words to make his appeal:

“**Meekness**” is a strong gentleness that describes a middle ground between being too angry and never being angry at all.

“**Gentleness**” is a sweet reasonableness that is tempered by love.

Paul did not try to lead by demanding submission to his authority he wanted them to desire to do what is right.

The criticisms and attacks were referred to by Paul as “war” [10:3].

Military figures of speech are used in 10:3-6; weapons ... fight ... warfare ... strongholds ... captive and punish disobedience as in a military court-martial.

The word “flesh” is used in two ways: the human body and the sinful nature [10:3].

The self-proclaimed false apostles accused Paul of worldliness and acting out of his sinful nature. Actually, it was they who were fighting him according to the flesh and in the world’s way of doing things.

¹⁵ But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶ so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence. ¹⁷ “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.