

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Our Warfare**

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**2 Corinthians 10:1-6**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10:1; that's on page 968 in your pew Bibles. We are back in our 2 Corinthians series and we find ourselves dealing with one of the strangest passages in all the New Testament. This passage is going to be a challenge for us today; it is not going to sound right to us as Canadian Christians. But it is right because it is the Word of God. Let me read it to you beginning at verse 1 and reading through to verse 6. This is God's Holy and inspired Word.

<sup>1</sup>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!—<sup>2</sup>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.<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.<sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.<sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,<sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:1-6 ESV)

Now, as I mentioned, this is an unusual text. So much so that some liberal scholars actually think that Paul must not have written it. They can't imagine how one pastor could be so gentle and forgiving in chapter 2 with one fellow and then so firm and pugnacious even with other people over here in chapter 10. That just doesn't go together in one person, they say. Well, it went together in Jesus didn't it? Jesus was very gentle with struggling sinners and very firm with false shepherds. Consider Jesus with the woman caught in adultery. He protected her from an angry

mob and from consequences that she probably deserved and after rebuking her accusers he said to her:

<sup>10</sup>“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”<sup>11</sup> She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” (John 8:10–11 ESV)

That’s Jesus – amen? Amen!

And yet to be fair, that isn’t the only Jesus we meet in the Bible. There is another Jesus – or at least – another SIDE of Jesus. To the false teachers and bad shepherds among the covenant community, Jesus could be pretty harsh. He said to them:

You blind fools! (Matthew 23:17 ESV)

hypocrites! (Matthew 23:23 ESV)

whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27 ESV)

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? (Matthew 23:33 ESV)

Woah! That sounds like a different Jesus. That is not “neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more” – that sounds like a very different Jesus. So what do we do with that? Well if you are a liberal scholar then you get out your red marker and you cross that right out of your Bible. But if you are one of those “tremble before the Word” types, then that’s not going to be an option. You are going to have to come to a different conclusion and I think the conclusion that we have to come to is that there is a time to fight and a time to forgive; there is a time to be hard and a time to be gentle; there is a time to cast out and there is a time to gather in. Now obviously we have to be careful here. Obviously this calls for discernment and so I think we are going to find this passage very useful because obviously Paul had thought a lot about this; he knew when to be gentle and when to be firm, he knew when to fight and when to forgive and so I want to use this passage to help us answer 4 common questions that we have in our hearts, as Canadians, concerning Christian warfare.

## **Understanding Christian Warfare:**

The first question I think we need to wrestle with is this:

## **Q1. When Do We Fight?**

It is clear from the text that Paul was not a fighter by nature. It wasn't his default pastoral posture. He says in verse 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 (2 Corinthians 10:2 ESV)

Paul says: "I anticipate that when I come there will be some fighting. We're going to go a few rounds – I'd rather not", he says. I'd rather you just repent and get this sorted out so that we didn't have to do this. Paul is clearly not SPOILING FOR A FIGHT. He is not afraid to fight, but he would rather not. You see the same thing in 1 Corinthians. He says:

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? (1 Corinthians 4:21 ESV)

"Do you want to have a smack down visit or a hang out and have fun visit? Its up to you. It depends on how I find you."

From all of that I think we can conclude that in the Christian life we only fight when we have to – but obviously, sometimes – WE HAVE TO. So when do we have to? That is what we want to figure out. First of all, based on the clues we find in the Corinthian correspondence, I think we can say with confidence that Christians have to fight:

### **i. When the authority of God's Word is being questioned in the church**

Much of 2 Corinthians is written to push back against the accusations and insinuations of the false apostles who were questioning Paul's right to speak for God. Most of this letter is a battle over authority. "Who speaks for God" – that is the most important question in any Christian assembly. Now, Paul is convinced that the Apostles of Jesus Christ speak for God, after all, Jesus said to the Apostles:

<sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to

you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12–15 ESV)

Jesus said that he would complete the Gospel proclamation through the mouth of his authorized Apostles via the agency of His Holy Spirit – Jesus SAID THAT and that is why the Apostles taught that the church is:

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20 ESV)

That is the authority structure of the Christian church. We've got authoritative prophets looking forward, we've got authoritative apostles looking backward and we've got Jesus Christ in the middle. Prophets anticipate, Apostles explicate and Christ is the source and ground of all – that is the sum total of Christian authority and if any piece of that equation is threatened then its GAME ON – ITS TIME to strap on and go to WAR because if we lose the Bible then we've lost it all!

When should a pastor get angry? When should he pull out the big guns and fire them from whatever platform he has, be it blog, pulpit or soap box in the public square? When the authority of the WHOLE WORD OF GOD is being questioned by people and pastors and writers and scholars in the church!

The devil has always trained his guns ON THE WORD OF GOD. The very first temptation began with the question: “DID GOD REALLY SAY?” That is always the point of attack and therefore that is the very place Christians must be most prepared to defend. That's where we need our biggest guns, that's where we need to deploy our brightest minds, that's where we need to aim our loudest mouths and our sharpest pens and our HARDEST TONES – BECAUSE WE CANNOT GIVE AN INCH ON THIS MATTER: WHEN THE BIBLE SPEAKS GOD SPEAKS – HERE I STAND AND I WILL DO NO OTHER!

That is the issue that determines the tone of the Apostle. Consider for example how gentle he is with the Thessalonians. Why does the Apostle speak to them with such kindness and softness we wonder – the answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 2 where Paul says:

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, **the word of God**, which is at work in you believers. (1

Thessalonians 2:13 ESV)

They accepted the word of the Apostles as the Word of God and therefore Paul treats them with gentleness and meekness only. He instructs, rather than rebukes. He builds up rather than tearing down. That is what Paul wanted to do in Corinth but to do that he had to first attack and tear down “arguments” and “lofty opinions” that were being tolerated and entertained as alternatives to the Word of God.

When do Christians fight? When worldly arguments and high-minded opinions are being treated in the church as authoritative over and against and alongside the inspired Word of God. That puts God’s people at risk and so when that happens real Christians put up a fight!

And then secondly, with respect to this first question, real Christians fight:

**ii. When blatant immorality is being permitted within the church**

We saw this back in 1 Corinthians 5. We won’t re-preach that sermon but you remember that gross sexual immorality was being openly tolerated in the church. They had misunderstood grace – they thought it meant that sin was simply overlooked and that mercy and kindness and an ethos of inclusion ought to always be maintained. They were wrong and Paul sent a clear shot across the bow. He said:

<sup>11</sup> I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:11–13 ESV)

Paul couldn’t be any clearer here, he says if this brother wants to call himself a Christian while living like a complete and utter pagan then you kick him out. Now. No ambiguity, no fuzzy logic – for Paul this is clear cut. The church is only for REPENTENT SINNERS. You can be a sinner but you cannot be an unrepentant sinner. The church is at war with her own sin and every soldier must stand their post in the battle. I want to be so clear here. We are not at war with sinners out in the world. We are at war with sin within the church – within us! This is a combat community! We are at war with remaining sin and no one inside the church – no one calling themselves a Christian - is allowed to pursue a separate peace.

Now I think that for us as Canadians – this is the biggest and most important question. If I could make a general comparison I think it would be fair to say that our American cousins are perhaps in danger of being too quick to battle. We are a different people. Our American cousins won their independence through blood, rebellion and fire. We waited 100 years and then just asked for it politely. That’s a different story and it has made us a different people. They may need a sermon on meekness and gentleness but we NEED A SERMON on courage and moral fortitude! They may need a sermon on when NOT TO FIGHT but we need THIS SERMON ON WHEN WE MUST FIGHT.

Brothers and sisters I fear we are already too late in this country. The church openly permits gross sexual immorality. We have entirely surrendered to worldly wisdom and high minded opinion and it is well past time that someone kicked over the hornet’s nest and bloodied the mouth of our enemy. We don’t need pastors and elders who WANT TO FIGHT – BUT GOD HOW WE NEED SHEPHERDS WHO WILL FIGHT WHEN THE SITUATION REQUIRES IT! There is a time to fight. When God’s Word is being assaulted and when abhorrent moral behaviour is being accommodated in the church then it is high time someone made a stink.

Now, I gave that the most time because I believe that question is the most urgent for us. Nevertheless there are a few other questions we must deal with briefly. The second question I’d like to look at is this:

## **Q2. What Are The Weapons Of Our Warfare?**

In verse 4 Paul says:

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4 ESV)

Paul doesn’t say in this passage what those weapons are but the context provides a variety of helpful clues. The commentaries on this passage generally point in the same direction. Paul Barnett for example says:

“We infer from the context (verses 1-2) that Paul is referring to his disciplinary ministry to them at the time of the

second visit and through the “Severe Letter” in regard to whose effectiveness, however, he and his detractors have different opinions.”<sup>1</sup>

So the weapons Paul is referring to here are:

- i. **Authoritative teaching**
- ii. **Corrective discipline**

Maybe that is helpful for you to hear; maybe that lowers the tension. As a Canadian maybe you were a little nervous there that after the sermon people were going to go out and punch people for Jesus. Let’s be clear then – no one is talking about that. We are not talking about physical confrontation, we’re not even talking about political processes whereby we might try and hijack the machinery of government in order to coerce moral behavior – no, we are talking about clear Bible teaching and a commitment to the internal processes of church discipline. We are talking about bold proclamation and a commitment to practicing what we preach inside the house of God. That’s how we fight. By being clear and when necessary, corrective. That’s how change happens. That’s how reformation happens. It happens when the Word of God is unleashed in the House of God. It happens when the church grows a spine. Its not about getting all tough “out there” its about being clear and convictional and correctional in here. That’s what we’re talking about. Clear teaching and corrective discipline.

The third question we need to address is this:

### **Q3. What Or Who Are We Actually Attacking?**

Its good to be all fired up, its good to have your powder dry and your musket loaded now where do we point this thing? What are we shooting at? Paul tells us in verse 5:

We destroy **arguments** and every **lofty opinion** raised against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV)

Alright, that is probably important for us to hear. We are not actually at war with people even though we will necessarily find ourselves engaging with people. Arguments and opinions are not

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle To The Corinthians* in *The New International Commentary On The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 464.

emailed to us from a conceptual vacuum located somewhere in outer space – they come to us out of the minds and mouths of people. Paul will go on to talk about the people in 12:13. There he says:

<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (2 Corinthians 11:13–15 ESV)

So Paul is engaging with people but he understands that those people are ultimately only agents for our ancient foe – the devil. Paul is very consistent on this issue. In Ephesians 6 he says:

<sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

So our ultimate enemy is not people – it is the devil and the lies and delusions and deceptions that he tries to smuggle through them into the house of God.

This VASTLY complicates things. Just stop for a minute and understand what all of this means. The devil recruits people. He has false apostles, deceitful workers disguised as agents of light. He has a human workforce. Some of these people don't even know that they are on the devil's payroll. Paul wrote to Timothy and said:

evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:13 ESV)

Paul says that there are people in the church who are working for the devil and they don't even know it! They are deceived and deceiving! Wow that complicates things! The devil uses human shields! He uses suicide bombers! He does not fight fair and this makes our job very hard. We have to win the battle without destroying the human agents on the other side. WOW. Wow. That is really hard to do and the apostles knowing that teach on this again and again – not just Paul.

Peter said to his people:

always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

Make a defense – defend the faith – but do it with gentleness and respect. Fight to win – but



don't kill the guy on the other side. That's tricky business. Who is sufficient for these things? This requires really careful thinking. It doesn't mean that we can't address these agents of the devil directly. We can, Paul did. He named names. This silly idea out there that you can't ever name a false teacher by name is absolutely ridiculous. Paul did it. Paul wrote to Timothy and said:

<sup>14</sup> Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup> **Beware of him** yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. (2 Timothy 4:14–15 ESV)

Beware of HIM. Alexander. By name. Paul called him out. Paul did not hate Alexander but Alexander opposed the Gospel and so Paul warned people AWAY FROM HIM. He named him by name. Naming people by name is not a sin. In fact the Bible says that if you teach publicly and you persist in error then you must be rebuked publicly. Paul says:

As for those who persist in sin, **rebuke them in the presence of all**, so that the rest may stand in fear. (1 Timothy 5:20 ESV)

The rules of conflict resolution between members of a local church in Matthew 18 do not apply to the matter of public error by recognized teachers in the church. Public teachers are held to a higher standard of discipline. The Bible says that:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1 ESV)

Every once in a while I will say the name of a false teacher that you need to beware of and someone will send me a kind email asking me why I did not follow the guidelines in Matthew 18. "Pastor, why didn't you speak to Joel Osteen personally before you rebuked his teaching in yesterday's sermon?" Let me be very clear about that. While I would very much like to have a one on one sit down with brother Joel I don't imagine that will happen any time soon. That's ok. Because he has said what he says publicly for a long time. He is an ordained gospel preacher. He assumed a higher standard of discipline the moment he stood in the pulpit. And if you are going to teach things that are contrary to the Word of God then you are going to be rebuked publicly by other shepherds until you stop. Plain and simple.

But let me be very clear. Joel is not the enemy, Joyce is not the enemy. I hope very much that

they will repent of their error and confine themselves to the plain, clear, authoritative Word of God. If/when that happens, I would be happy to embrace them as brothers and sisters in Christ. I am not OPPOSED TO THE PEOPLE – I am taking aim at the devil behind. I would see the people set free. I would see the brothers and the sisters turned back and brought within the fold.

That is a subtle distinction but it is very, very important. People are not the enemy – false teachers even - are not the enemy. They themselves are deceived even as they are deceiving. We aim always at the devil behind.

The final question I want to consider is this:

#### **Q4. What Is Our Ultimate Objective?**

What is the end game? What are we ultimately after here? Paul tells us in verses 5-6:

<sup>5</sup>take every thought captive to obey Christ, <sup>6</sup>being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:5–6 ESV)

What is the ultimate objective here? Obedience. This ought not to be terribly surprising; we are after all in the obedience business. Do you remember the Great Commission? Jesus said:

<sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them **to obey everything** I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19–20 NIV)

We are in the OBEDIENCE BUSINESS! We need to hear that church! Too often we think that we are in the DECISION BUSINESS. We are not! Nowhere in the Bible are you told to go and generate DECISIONS. Jesus did not send us out to make decisions he sent us out to make DISCIPLES!!!! Disciples obey. That is a longer walk my friends; that is a life long FIGHT, but that is the mission we've been called to. That's our ultimate objective.

#### **Conclusion:**

So, I say again, who is sufficient for these things? Who has the power within themselves to win a battle such as this? Not me. Not you. Not even the Apostle Paul. Paul knew where the power

comes from, he says in verse 4 that his weapons work because they:

have **divine power** (2 Corinthians 10:4 ESV)

They have power from God. Church, we have power from God. We have the Word of God. We have the Spirit of God. We have everything we need to call people out of darkness into his marvelous light. By the grace of God and with his power working and speaking through us – we can do this – not of ourselves – but in the power of God we can break every chain, we can set captives free, we can open blind eyes and we can teach freed slaves how to walk with Jesus and obey all his commands. We can make disciples! In the power of God we can do this. In the name of God we were told to do this. That’s the business. That’s the call. That’s the fight and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.